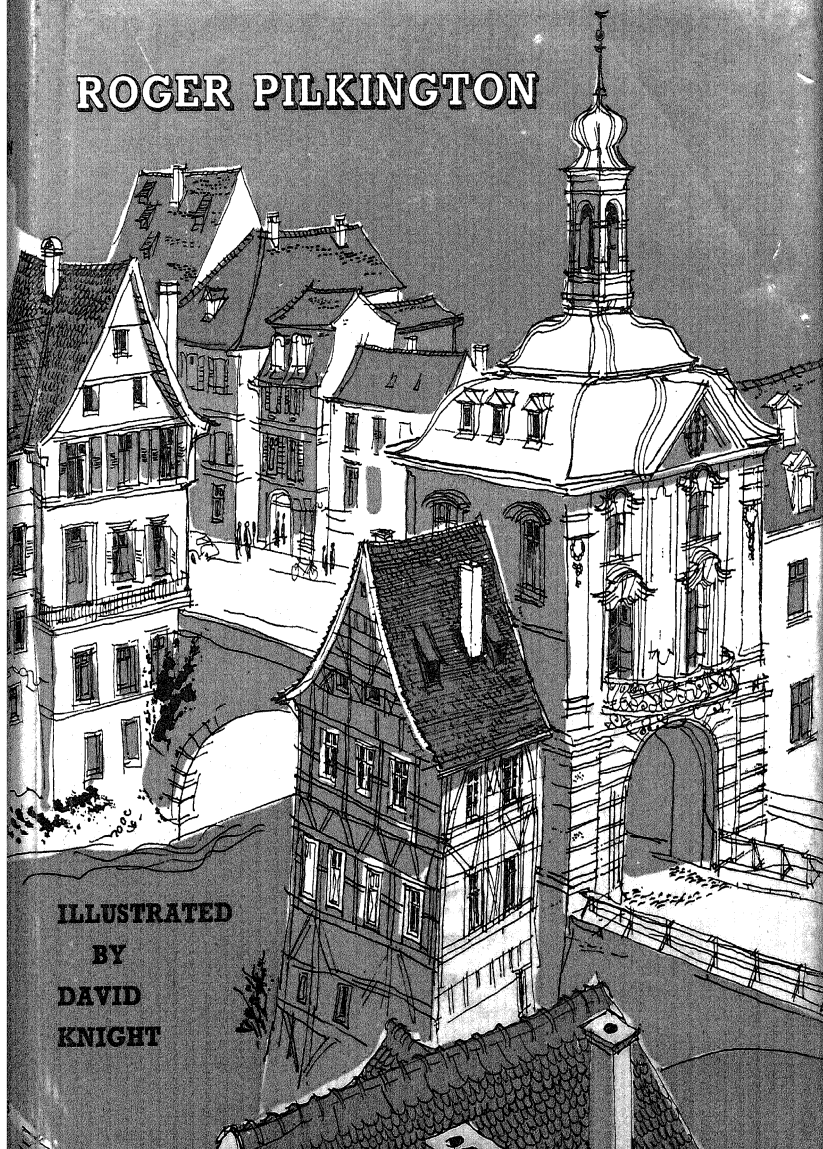




# SMALL BOAT TO BAVARIA

ROGER PILKINGTON

ILLUSTRATED  
BY  
DAVID  
KNIGHT





THE *Commodore* has carried Roger Pilkington through many of the waterways of Western Europe, and now she pushes her inquisitive nose up two of Europe's most enchanting rivers, the Neckar and the Main.

Through the Odenwald into Swabia, and past the sandstone bluffs of the Main valley deep into Bavaria she makes her unhurried way, giving Dr. Pilkington plenty of time to delve into the history of the villages and cities of these delightful streams. Whether it be stories of robber barons and abducted maidens, the carvings of Riemenschneider, the Rococo palaces of the Prince-Bishops of Würzburg, the golden geese—which indeed exist in the valley of the Main—a modern hydraulics research laboratory or the mysterious beauty of the deep forests, Roger Pilkington writes of them all with the same interest and charm that have made the *Commodore's* earlier voyages a delight to so many.

This journey carries the reader into one of the most attractive corners of Europe, one that has hardly changed with the centuries. SMALL BOAT TO BAVARIA can be strongly recommended not only to the boat-minded and intending visitors to Southern Germany, but also to those who find travelling most enjoyable of all when done in an armchair at home.

*The New York Times* wrote of one of the previous 'Small Boat' books: "a more pleasant way of learning something about the history and geography (of Europe) can hardly be imagined."

With nineteen drawings by David Knight

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## SMALL BOAT TO BAVARIA

DATE DUE

1963





# SMALL BOAT TO BAVARIA

BY  
ROGER PILKINGTON

*Illustrated by David Knight*

ST MARTIN'S PRESS  
1962

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MACMILLAN AND COMPANY LIMITED  
*St Martin's Street London WC 2*  
*also Bombay Calcutta Madras Melbourne*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED  
*Toronto*

ST MARTIN'S PRESS INC  
*New York*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

‘Visitors to Germany are under considerable obligations to the enterprising speculators who have converted the Rhine into a high road. It is true this easy mode of communication has destroyed something of the romance of the region of legends, but it does not force any man to adopt it by the destruction of more ancient modes of journeying. There are still tedious, dangerous banks and unskilful boatmen to lead the enthusiastic into excitement and danger, and no law exists to oppose the wayfarer’s tardy progress according to his sublimer fancies.’

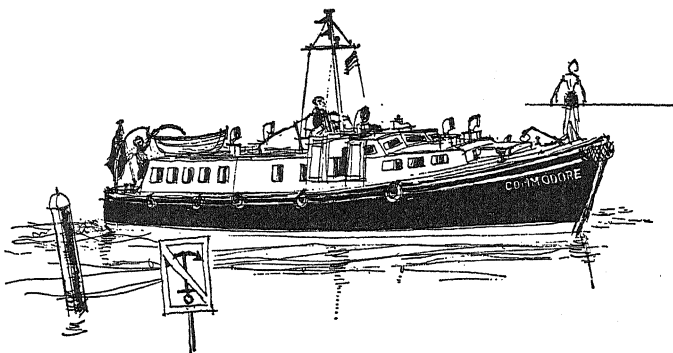
‘A Travelling Artist’  
*The Rhenish Album*, 1836

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## FOREWORD

When the *Commodore* visited the rivers of southern Germany she was fourteen years old. Compared with the solid old hull of Nelson's flagship she was decidedly young, no more than an early teenager, and yet she already had behind her as varied an experience as many long-funnelled and portly old steamers have had in a lifetime. Her infancy was admittedly somewhat quiet, for she spent the first two years of her life as the Admiral's Barge of the Royal Navy at Hamburg, conscientiously barging about among the larger vessels on such important duties as were hers by right — and to judge from the fact that at that time her only domestic equipment was a rack for bottles her spell of duty may have been hilarious rather than onerous.

Whether or not the whisky was in any way connected with the circumstances which led to her early retirement I do not know, but the fact remains that her beautiful engines with their murmuring call of *hurry hurry hurry hurry* came one day to be run without oil. With curious lack of chivalry the Royal Navy ordered her to be towed across Germany, Holland, Belgium, and what the Germans call 'the Canal' and the French 'the Sleeve (or the Rubber of Bridge)' to the Medway, where their Lordships of the Admiralty had her deposited on a mudbank with all the callousness of Spartan parents getting rid of a child which did not quite meet the physical standards set by the city fathers.

She was just three years old when we found her. At four she had already explored the whole length of the Thames, and at the age of

six she ventured abroad again for the first time since the abdominal operation which had removed her derelict motors and installed a single, simple paraffin engine. Overcome by *Wanderlust*, she very soon discovered that beyond the Channel the waterways led over the hills or through reedy meres, across wild lakes and in and out of rocky skerries, by canals, aqueducts, locks and tunnels, boat-lifts and creeks and cuts, to almost every corner of Europe, to Rumst and Boom, to the Ob and the Aa, and even by a stretch of imagination to Pinsk and Omsk.

Whether or not she will ever reach the Sea of Okhotsk by the overland route remains to be seen, but she is in no hurry. She has found plenty to explore nearer home, and before she came to turn her inquisitive nose into the German rivers she had even reached Norway by canal — a feat which, I believe, no other ship from Britain has ever accomplished — and passed through more than a thousand locks in eight countries. But more important than the number of locks was her discovery that a reasonably reliable engine and adequate sense on the part of her human companions were all that was necessary to take her to the heart of some of the most beautiful countries in the world.

The notion is still not entirely dead that to voyage over the Channel or up through the Baltic is something which demands immense skill, superhuman courage, the sole ownership if possible of a fair-sized gold mine, and several tons of expensive accessories ranging from astrolabes to gyrocompasses and automatic super-heterodyne transistor-fed asymmetric polarizing punkmeters. If this folklore survives, I suspect that the fault is partly that of some of our yachting authors. Having read how Magellan's crew were obliged to eat the leather off whatever it was that had leather bindings, and how the masters of sailing vessels would round the Horn before the stump of what used to be the mast before a wave snapped it like a matchstick, they must go one better, or if possible half a dozen. And so it comes about that the most mundane voyages are transformed into tales about which Freud, if he were still alive, would be able to say plenty — much of it slanted, no doubt, in the particular direction of which he was so inordinately fond.



Or is it just that the writers want to keep the seas and even the rivers and canals to themselves? Certainly one cannot blame the reader who follows the intrepid navigator page by page as he unreaves the burpers with his teeth during a hurricane, dives under the keel to splive the barrat-leams with one hand whilst keeping a giant sting ray at sting's length with the other, or with the matches wet and the paraffin long since drunk for want of rum he toasts a death's-head octopus by St Elmo's fire — no, it is hardly the reader's fault if he would rather stay at home and become a maturing full-life policy in the Bank Holiday motor traffic than venture abroad in a boat.

Yet to navigate the coasts and inland waters of Europe demands no great skill, though it is perhaps useful to be reasonably certain which is the N and which the S end of a compass needle. A sound ship is worth a dozen books on rhumbelines and azimuths, and this soundness embraces much more than just the fact that her bottom is unlikely to fall out. It means comfortable bunks, a lack of chrome to polish, enough headroom to be able to stand up without getting either concussion or yachtsman's stoop, and if possible an open fire to sit beside and make toast at when the rain outside is still falling.

In these respects and many others the *Commodore* is sounder than a bell. She can sleep six, or occasionally eight, there is room throughout to stand up straight, and for cold and clammy evenings she has a wood fire and central heating. If I do not give more personal details of her looks and vital statistics, it is because these have already appeared in the forewords to the earlier volumes of her biography — for this Bavarian journey is the seventh book of her travels.

It sometimes surprises people that the *Commodore* is allowed to go wherever she wishes without let, hindrance or licence. Her crew are frequently asked whether any of them have a pilot's ticket, and if the question comes from a harbourmaster the answer is quickly and truthfully given that she carries not one pilot but usually two. If necessary, the certificates can be produced, and very impressive they are. Dark green on a creamy background they bear a picture of a weather-beaten helmsman standing at the wheel in oilskins and

sou'wester, and the words PILOT'S TICKET followed by the name of the examinee in gothic lettering, and *Distinction* added in red. They are pilot's certificates of such splendour that they make those issued by the Brotherhood of the Holy and Undivided Trinity and of St Clement of Deptford Strond look like so much old newspaper. The issuing authority is only stated by its initial letters as C.U. and L.M.S., but no harbourmaster would display such ignorance as to ask what this might mean. If he did, he would be surprised to know that the letters stand for *Congregational Union and London Missionary Society*, whose combined classes for children on the history of the church in the world are run on nautical and ship-shape lines. The certificates fortunately bear no date, so it is unnecessary to explain to navigation authorities how the examinations came to be taken when the pilots concerned were not even teenagers.

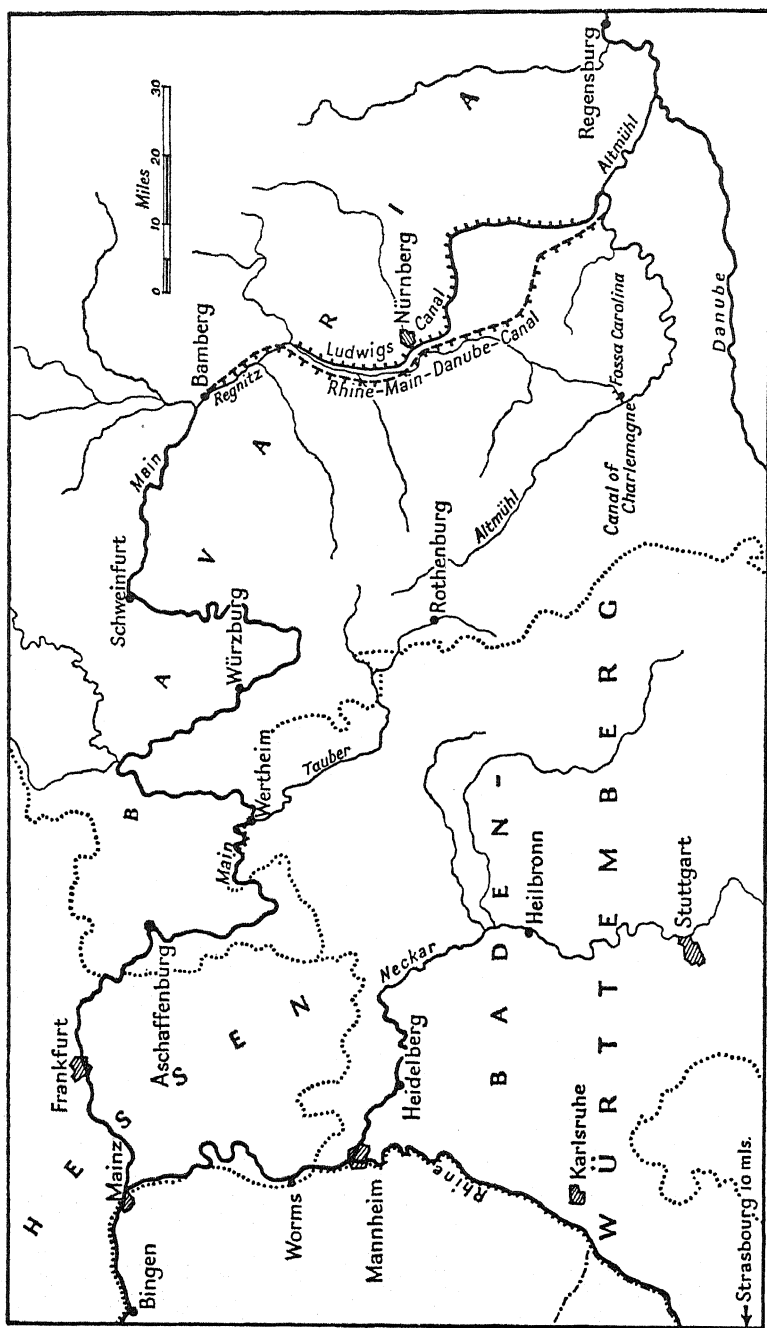
I have never returned home from a voyage, leaving the *Commodore* at some village wharf until the following spring, without being quite certain that the particular waterways we have just visited together are the loveliest in the world, and the towns and villages along their banks the most beautiful to be found anywhere. This is as true of the Neckar and the Main as of any other waterways which the *Commodore* has ever explored, and yet as rivers they are known mainly to the crews of the commercial craft which run up them from the highway of the Rhine.

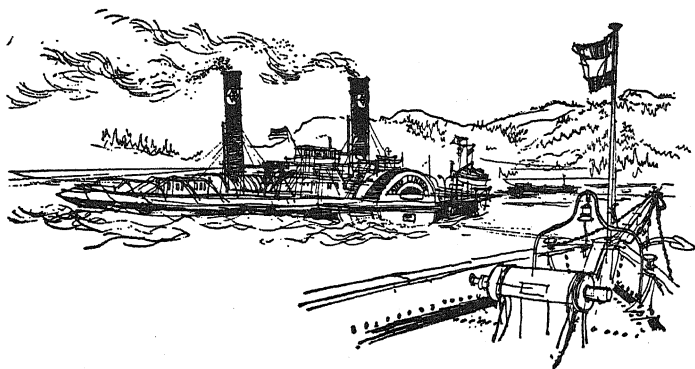
It is these two streams, together with the course of the Rhine from the Black Forest to the Taunus hills which form the subject of this present book.

ROGER PILKINGTON

*Highgate, 1962*







## I

*From France to Germany — Rhine shipping — Roman patrol boats — by ship to Frankfurt fair — the coming of steam — rafting down river — arrival at the frontier*

The *Commodore* dropped slowly between the cool and glistening walls of the *Écluse Nord*. Beyond the steel plates of the lock gate in front of her bows lay the fore-harbour and the exit into the Rhine; behind her the myriads of dormer windows in the mottled roofs of Strasbourg looked out over the suburbs towards the rich fields of maize and barley and tobacco, or away to the foothill villages where the storks sat on the municipal buildings to watch the vintners tending the vines which would yield the rich Tokay and Gewürztraminer of Alsace. The *Commodore* herself had spent several pleasant weeks in the Alsatian waterways, having found her way to them from Holland by ascending the Meuse to near Toul and then following the Canal de la Marne au Rhin to cross the Vosges and drop down fifty-two locks to the plain below. She had taken this route partly for interest, but chiefly because a voyage upstream in the Rhine itself would have raised certain problems. Her top speed, except for short bursts of hard panting, is seven knots. In places the Rhine can also achieve seven knots, and though she might have been able to hold her own, we did not wish to spend months of time and barrels of fuel hovering in midstream without making any measurable progress up the river.

Sharing the lock with her were a Dutch tug and lighter, and a gleaming tanker, the *Edelweiss*, her bows spick and span with the pillar-box red and the white geometrical cross of Switzerland. Both were bound downstream, probably to Rotterdam, 711 kilometres further down the great river which drains the northern side of the Alps. But the *Commodore* had no such long voyage immediately ahead of her, for her next port of call was to be Kehl, almost straight across the invisible frontier line of nations which theoretically divides the river in two.

A bell rang in urgent warning to anyone foolish enough to be standing on the lock-gate, which then began to slide silently into a recess at the side of the lock. The Dutch tug wheezed, the steel hawsers fell with a clatter to the deck of the *Edelweiss*, and with a *chfff . . . pah . . . tunkety-tunkety-tunkety* her heavy engine began to send a wash streaming back to slop against the rear gates. The red lights on the entrance closed their eyes, the green ones blinked, and the *Commodore* slipped out to move past the line of waiting vessels towards the point of the outer mole, beyond which lay the Rhine.

In the harbour and the *avant-port* the water was black and sterile, laden with coal dust in suspension but marbled over with a pretty iridescence of interference colours caused by the thin film of diesel oil spreading out from the fuel-sodden banks of the refinery basin, but from the tip of the enclosing breakwater a sharp line of demarcation ran straight as an arrow to fade away further downstream. Across this boundary the water was steely grey, cold and clean and swirling in the ceaseless heave of turbulent wavelets, and as the *Commodore* crossed the divide the current snatched her and swept her exuberantly on its shoulders. Slanting out into the broad stream of the Rhine, she kept clear of the smooth patches of overfall which marked where the *Buhnen* or training walls lay hidden just below the surface, and a few minutes later she swung round to stem the current and sidle out of the stream into the still water of a long harbour on the further shore. Two officers in peaked caps leaned out of a sleek launch and signed to her to draw alongside. She had arrived at Kehl, and with proper formality she was to declare her honourable intentions to the customs authorities of the Bundesrepublik.

Kehl has nothing to commend it. Linked to Strasbourg by the huge span of the Pont du Rhin at one of the swiftest points on the whole course of the great river it was elevated from being little more than a suburb of that great city when Hitler decided to develop it as a rival to the flourishing French port across the stream. Huge basins were dug, quays and dock railways laid out, cranes installed to unload the Rhine barges which had forged their way upstream from the Ruhr and the North Sea ports, for Kehl was to become a major port serving a hinterland stretching away beyond the Black Forest to Bavaria and the Tyrol. Only in the last year or two had the ships begun to desert it, when the newly opened Port of Stuttgart at the head of the Neckar had offered better facilities lying deeper in the heart of the south German countryside. A few coke-lighters, a covey of river gunboats and some United States naval craft still lay alongside the quays of Kehl as the *Commodore* ran up the harbour, but the signs of decay were unmistakable. Kehl's time had come and gone.

We had put in to fuel, and also to acquire a pilot with local knowledge of the course as far as Karlsruhe. Our friend Monsieur Giraud of the Port Autonome de Strasbourg had repeatedly stressed to us that a pilot was essential for this part of the river on account of the submerged walls spaced at regular intervals along the bed to deflect the current and scour out the channel, but which were not marked in any way. In places — as he showed us on the engineer's drawings of the bed — these massive stone dykes ran more than half way across the stream, and they could easily wreck any vessel which strayed to the side of the navigation channel.

Our pilot was a cheerful, weather-tanned man with a broad and genial face. His name, he told us as he shook hands on the oil-covered steps of a pipe-line jetty, was Kopf. We were surprised at his youth, but this was only because he was the first we had ever taken in continental waters who was under seventy. Usually we found that pilotage was quite unnecessary, and all the way from Dunkirk to Uppsala we had only employed one for the difficult trip through the narrow and uncharted channels of the watts between the Weser and Elbe — uncharted, that is, except for the admiralty hydrographer's curt sign 'numerous wrks.' This particu-

lar area was Germany's answer to the Goodwin Sands, and on our outward trip we had had the services of a shrimping-skipper of nearly eighty, whilst on the return we were in the hands of a retired lifeboatman of only seventy-three — both of them expert pilots with special knowledge of these tricky waters. Herr Kopf was by no means a mere lad, but in comparison with these elder statesmen of the tidal channels he struck us as decidedly young. He was certainly on the right side of forty.

We helped him to carry his moped down the slippery steps and lashed it against the davits at the stern. Then we turned the *Commodore* in the stagnant water and set her head towards the Rhine. Soon we were slipping gaily down the river, with Kopf following the channel which he knew from experience, but which was not marked in any way whatsoever. Sometimes we would be in mid-stream, at others skirting the slight smoothness which showed where the stone dykes lay just below the surface, or he would cut right over to take the deep water within a few feet of the bank.

Even here we were never out of sight of the heavy traffic. It might be a diminutive tug hauling a couple of unladen lighters downstream ahead of us, or one of the giant pullers of Rotterdam or Basle towing behind it a trio of heavy ships, one or two of which would be lending a hand with their own motors. One of these, the *Uri*, bright red and gleaming in her Swiss national costume was frothing and foaming close to the bank, setting up a tremendous wash of standing waves as she doggedly pulled her load of several thousand tons of cargo on the last day but one of the ascent to Basle. She was one of the largest of the Swiss river-tugs, second only to her sister *Unterwalden* which, with four thousand horsepower, was the most powerful ship on the Rhine.

At times we would be passed by a Dutch vessel travelling back unladen to the Ruhr or Rotterdam, her bows lifted clear of the water with the rush of her speed and the weight of her engine setting the stern down deeper. And, so deeply laden as to be awash to just below the hold covers, a Neptun Express freighter would be raising the water in a smooth hump to either side of her stern as she panted up the river, overtaking everything except perhaps some of the streamlined vessels of the German shipping lines of Mannheim



and Duisburg. In deference to local usage — and in self defence, too — we had rigged a spar from the mast to stick out clear to starboard, and to its tip we had secured a pulley as part of the system by which we could haul on a line and send aloft a large flag of intermediate blue when necessary. This flag is carried by all ships on the Rhine and its navigable tributaries, and it is shown when a skipper wishes to meet an oncoming ship starboard to starboard instead of port to port, which is the normal rule of the road. The object, of course, is to allow the upcoming traffic to choose the slacker water on the inside of a bend.

Rhine ships sometimes have another similar blue flag which can be hoisted near the bows, and which means that a vessel is engaged in overtaking another. This might seem rather superfluous, but in fact a tug hauling a tow-train which is spread out over half a mile may need to keep well in the middle of the river until its final tow is clear, and to an oncoming ship it may not be at all obvious that it is passing anything at all. But we dispensed with this refinement, if only because we did not happen to have a second blue flag. Besides, it was not likely that we would be overtaking very many ships, and if we should do so the *Commodore* was not so bulky that she would be in the way of any coming in the opposite direction.

Without its shipping, the course of the Rhine from the Swiss frontier, past Strasbourg and all the way down to Mannheim would be dull. For nearly two hundred miles it passes no town except Breisach, perched on an outlying hump of the Kaiserstuhl hills. Strasbourg and Karlsruhe are large inland ports, but the cities and even the docks are set away from the Rhine for a very good reason. For centuries the great river, carrying the water of the melting snows from Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein, has twisted and turned, sweeping first one way and then the other under its own momentum to change its course to such an extent that over the ages it has worn for itself a bed of shingle buried in silt, a plain which is in places nearly twenty miles from side to side. It is upon this plain that the farmers of Alsace grow their maize and tobacco, and those of Baden on the opposite shore cultivate the best asparagus in Germany, yet the actual course of the river will be a

single channel perhaps a couple of hundred yards across, flanked by the swamps which show where not so long ago the river lay.

Crossing such a plain, the turbulent Rhine has always been unpredictable. A violent flood was no uncommon event in former centuries, and overnight the river might desert its course for a new one — as in 1296, when the town of Breisach itself, perched on its private hill on the left bank, was transferred to the right bank by a sudden shift of the flooded river. So capricious was the behaviour of the Rhine, that settlements built upon its banks were liable to be swept away in the torrent from the melting snows of the Alps, and natural prudence led the people of the plain to build their towns well to the side of the course. Except for Mannheim — an artificial and relatively modern creation — there is no single town actually set upon the river, all the way from Breisach to the point where the Rhine strikes against the hills of the Taunus near Mainz and has to behave itself in a more orderly fashion.

And so, for mile after mile the Rhine flows, but through nowhere at all. The modern bed is an improved and corrected one with floodbanks set well back, but apart from an occasional inn where a ferry crosses from shore to shore the river is flanked only by its fringe of deserted swamps and thickets, with a line of poplars standing upright along the top of each bank, a row of sentries standing to attention, lining for mile upon mile the route of the royal Rhine. These poplar guardsmen are mute and unbending, and it is the ships themselves which give life to the scene between their ranks.

Traffic on the Rhine is as old as history. On the lower reaches, where the river loses its vigour and impetuosity to flow smoothly over the Netherlands flats towards the marches and the sea, the Roman general Drusus installed a fleet of oared vessels, army ships of their day. Some were built at Boulogne and reached the Rhine by journeying up the same sandy coast where the holidaymakers lie in their sun-chairs at Blankenberghe and Knocke-le-Zoute, and where two thousand years after Drusus the water was ripped by shells and bombs as another fleet of ships, no larger in length and beam or deeper in draught, took off the stunned remnants of an army from the beaches. Others were launched from stocks on the

Rhine itself. Yet for centuries before the smartly ordered Roman fleet of occupation roved upon the Rhine to the rhythmic beats of their time-givers, the tribes which bordered on the Rhine used rafts of tree-trunks hewn from the German forests to carry their goods downstream. Such craft were prudently *verboten* by the Romans, who discouraged the 'barbarians' from such menacing occupations as ship-owning, and after Varus had left the corpses of his routed legionaries scattered through the glades of the Teutoburg forest Germanicus promptly expanded the Rhine flotilla to a thousand ships — most of which were lost in one single great disaster when storm-wind and tide and flood combined to overwhelm them in the shelterless wastes of the delta of the Rhine and Meuse. Under Julian the number was reduced to six hundred, and by Constantine to a mere hundred.

These Roman ships formed a mobile force which could hurry troops to any area where the local inhabitants were becoming rebellious — for the Roman Reich did not extend beyond the defensive rampart of the *Limes* a short way eastward of the river. But they also performed the same function as is carried on today by the sleek grey craft of the *Wasserschutzpolizei*, patrolling the stream to protect and assist the slower and defenceless commercial craft. Many of the patrol vessels were triremes which, oddly enough, had the same dimensions as the standard French canal barges of today — 38 metres length, with a beam of 4 or 5 metres. Others were *liburnes*, with a large sail and two banks of oars, and enclosed quarters for the captain, second officer and steersman. The *liburnes* also carried out an ice-breaking service by day and night, but this was not designed to assist navigation so much as to prevent the German tribes from seizing the opportunity to launch an attack across the frozen river.

The Roman merchant vessels consisted of a miscellaneous collection of craft, most of them larger than the more finely lined military ships, and they relied more upon their sails and on the push of the current when voyaging downstream. For the return journey they often had a mast for the haulage line, very much in the style of the French traction-boats of today. Towing was by manpower, and in the museum at Trier on the Moselle are several

reliefs, taken from the tombs of Roman shipmasters and vintners, showing the heavy craft laden with casks of wine being bank-hauled by men, each of whom might have a stout staff to give him the extra power of a third and wooden leg.

Curiously enough, just as the Rhine had its patrolling protection vessels two thousand years ago, so too the cargoes which the commercial shippers then carried were much the same as today. Bricks, stones and tiles were the main trade on the Rhine, and the only cargo of the present century which exceeds this traffic is coal. Glass, bales of cloth, grain, wine, salt and ceramics were passing down the Rhine in Roman times just as they do in the era of heavy motor-vessels, and often enough they were bound for the same ports. The Romans withdrew, but the volume of shipping continued to increase into the Middle Ages, for the Rhine formed a main transport highway in a Europe where national frontier lines were still as yet practically unknown. Then, with the Renaissance and the rise of nation states, its use gradually declined until at last the river was practically deserted. Only after the French Revolution did the shipping begin to come into its own again.

In the Middle Ages there were some excellent passenger services. The Frankfurt Fair, founded by Charlemagne and still going strong, drew visitors from all over Europe and many of them came by river boat. Pilgrimages, too, were a good source of water-travellers. Already in 1105 the modern passenger ships of the Köln-Düsseldorfer line were foreshadowed by a service which carried two hundred passengers daily between Mainz and Frankfurt, with a halt at Höchst for lunch. Three centuries later these bulky horse-drawn vessels were carrying three hundred passengers at a time, and children under fourteen were taken at half fare. Soon afterwards a fast yacht service was added, with cabins of different classes and saloon and baggage-room all complete. In the restaurant one could make a handsome meal of omelette, roast chicken, steak and wine, and the voyage was accomplished in eight hours, including the halt at Höchst.

For special events the Rhine was the most natural means of transport. It was by ship from Basle that the Emperor Sigismund set out for Aix-la-Chapelle in 1413, to be crowned where his

predecessors had been enthroned before him, and if Basle was also chosen as the venue of the great Church Council which met from 1431 to 1438, it was solely because the shipping services on the Rhine made travel simpler for many of the bishops and cardinals who went there, attended by their retinues of secretaries, chaplains and servants. Even as far as the Lake of Constance the river was an artery of transport, and Schaffhausen's name still reminds a modern generation of the great warehouses or *Schiffhäuser* in which the merchandise was stored whilst awaiting carriage by land over the portage around the Rhine Falls. Voyagers seeking a passage from Strasbourg were in the habit of striking a price with an official of the port on the River Ill, and then in the cookshop of the Ancre — an inn on the Quai des Bateliers from which, half a millennium later, the *Commodore* was to set out towards the harbour lock and the Rhine — dice would be thrown to determine which of the boatmen was to be engaged for the journey. Lower down, the family of Gutenberg, the printer, was running a regular service from Mainz to Bingen, and already in the sixteenth century the mail between Basle and Strasbourg was being carried by water rather than by land.

Then came Gustavus Adolphus and his Swedish armies, sacking the German lands so thoroughly that, after they had passed, there were no longer hundreds of trading vessels based on the ruined port of Mainz but only four. More than twelve months passed between two successive sailings from Basle with cargoes for ports further down the river. Ships were destroyed, burned, sunk or left to rot at their moorings, and only Frankfurt-on-the-Main still preserved a certain activity of loading and unloading at its wharves — for not even the Swedes could extinguish the continental trading at the annual fair.

For the shipmen of the Middle Ages the voyage downstream was simple enough — except for the hazard of a possible wrecking on reefs in the gorge near Bingen — but towage upstream demanded plenty of power, for the vessels had to battle against as stiff a current as there is today. As many as sixty to eighty men were spanned in line to haul a ship through the reaches above Speyer where, on account of the marshy nature of the ground, no proper towpath

existed for horses. Above Karlsruhe they were often obliged to struggle against the stream, with the water up to their waists, and the long haul from there to Strasbourg could sometimes occupy a whole fortnight.

As soon as Napoleon had been properly disposed of by the Battle of Waterloo, steamships began to penetrate the Rhine, and it must have been an astonishing event for the people of the Rhine-land villages when the *Caledonia*, taking advantage of a temporary period of high water in the river, flailed her way past them to draw in at the Mosel quay at Koblenz. The appearance of a steamer was in itself enough to bring people running from their houses to the water's edge as she puffed and wheezed past Bonn and Remagen and Andernach, but even more surprising was the fact that she had made the voyage from London. Above Koblenz the river was swifter and much more difficult to navigate, but ten years later the *Ludwig* steamed smokily into the port of Strasbourg, and when the *Stadt Frankfurt* arrived at Basle in 1832, the first steamship ever to reach the port, her intrepid performance — which had involved a stranding off Breisach — was greeted with a salvo of cannon, brass bands and a liberal dispensing of the Markgräfler wines of the area. Shortly afterwards, the Köln-Düsseldorfer company began the services which are still one of the familiar sights of the Rhine, and by 1840 they were already carrying half a million passengers annually.

Quite apart from shipping, rafting is an old-established activity on the river, and in Roman times there were guilds of raftmen who delivered the floats of tree-trunks from the Black Forest, steering them down between the rocks and shoals for delivery as far downstream as the Netherlands. It is only in quite recent times that rafting down the Rhine has become too dangerous on account of the immense amount of shipping — for even a tug cannot entirely control a mass of timber several hundred feet in length as it is caught and swung by the turbulence of the faster stretches. On the Main they still exist in small numbers, and the *Commodore* was to encounter several as she made her way up into Bavaria.

Fishing vessels have also declined, though for a different reason. Formerly they plied in great numbers, and in the sixteenth century

they were even supplying the Paris market with salmon caught in the Rhine. More than one-eighth of a million salmon were taken as late as 1889, many of them caught below Duisburg. Today, with the river poisoned by effluents, no salmon could hope to survive the journey from the sea to breed in the higher reaches, and the cleaner water of the upper river has to be stocked by fish imported from California. Eels, however, are not so sensitive to the chemicals voided by modern industry, and even today one may see fishing-boats hanging at anchor at many places along the river, particularly where a small tributary runs in to join the main stream.

We wondered how our pilot would manage to control the ship. The *Commodore* steers somewhat in the fashion of a bicycle — not that she has handle-bars, but she does not go straight of her own accord, and the moment the steersman looks over his shoulder to admire the view or see what is coming up behind her she immediately swerves away from her course. Her wheel has to be worked continually, like a slow-motion coffee grinder, and we have sometimes wondered whether we might not be able to put the endless turning of the wheel to some auxiliary and useful purpose — such as grinding coffee for the next boiling. Thoroughly accustomed to her habits we could ourselves steer her straight as an arrow by anticipating the next wild plunge which she intended to make, but our experience had shown us that other steersmen who could keep a trawler or a two-thousand ton cargo vessel on a course as straight as a railway track would for the first few minutes take her zig-zagging through the water in such a way that we expected at any moment to be boarded by coastguards, appalled at the sight of a ship apparently steered by an inebriate. But Kopf very quickly mastered the art of her wheel, merely remarking that she did not steer like a Rhine barge. To this we readily agreed, but the full import of his remark did not occur to us until we reached the frontier.

Close to the French town of Lauterbourg the boundary line, which up to there has run down the centre of the stream, cuts across westwards towards the Saar, and the river becomes German from shore to shore. At this point there is a backwater formed from one of the many minor parts of the stream suppressed during the

improvement of its bed for navigation, and on the corner stands a smart control cabin which would do justice to an international airport. Yard-arms, masts, signals, aerals and mysterious but no doubt important devices sprout from its roof, and in the entrance to the creek below it lie the rakish speed launches of the German customs.

It was almost dark as we approached the frontier post of Neuburgweier, and there was no customs cutter out in the stream. Five were lying in the creek, three of them moored side by side at a jetty. We were nearly abreast of the control tower when lights began to flash and a miscellany of objects were hauled to the yard-arms, and Kopf remarked that we were being summoned in for inspection. At the same time eleven officers dressed in various shades and degrees of extremely smart uniforms began to descend the steps to the jetty and hurdle over the two inner craft to reach the one on the outside. Evidently we were to be received in considerable style.

Kopf glanced over his shoulder, spun the wheel, and turned the *Commodore* to head upstream. By the time she had turned, she was already a little way below the customs post and barely stemming the five knots of current. He pulled back the throttle, and she raised her nose proudly to surge over the wavelets; the moment she drew out of the stream into the still water of the creek she shot forward like a motor torpedo-boat bound on some desperate mission. The customs vessels were no more than thirty yards straight ahead of her, and somewhat to our surprise Kopf aimed directly for the wheelhouse of the outer vessel as though holding it in his gun-sights.

With only ten yards to go, we considered that the time had come to lean quickly across the pilot and slip the gear-lever as unostentatiously as possible into reverse. It was still a moment or two before he spun the wheel hard to starboard to swing the *Commodore* round on her nose, but contrary to what he expected she did not pivot at the bow. She swung a little, certainly, but only enough to bring the door of the wheelhouse of the customs cutter straight ahead. With the weight of two double-decker London buses in her sturdy frame she was still moving at a speed of several knots



towards her target, and if Kopf thought she would swing her stern in neatly to close the cutter he was mistaken. Close it she certainly did, but hardly according to the established etiquette of Rhine navigation.

Somebody shouted, and the contingent of officers raced to the side of their ship, converging from every quarter towards what they correctly judged to be the point of impending impact. Inside the rail they were bunched together in a tight mass, and so it came about that the object which took the full weight of the blow of the thick rope fender which fortunately embellished the *Commodore's* nose was a tall and handsome officer in green. Gallantly he braced himself to receive the impact of her elephant charge, but he was shoved forcefully back upon a rather thick set individual behind him. At that very moment a third officer who was taking a short cut through the wheelhouse was just about to open the door when it burst inwards and the two men were flung on top of him. As the *Commodore* struck the gunwale of the ship with her steel stem the shock sent several of the remaining members of the team reeling against the deck-house, and she came to rest with her nose sniffing inquisitively the cigar-laden smoke of the control room. There was no doubt that she had arrived. Indeed, she seemed positively eager to present herself for customs examination at close quarters.

The impact was followed by angry shouts, but these were not directed at us, or at her. Nor were they intended for the unfortunate Kopf, who certainly looked surprised at what had happened. They came from the man at the bottom of the heap in the wheelhouse who, it seemed, did not like the others to fall upon him so violently and without warning.

The men struggled to their feet, straightened out their uniforms and picked up their caps. For a moment there was a silence even more embarrassing to the pilot than it was to us. Then one of the officers who had not himself been bowled over began to laugh, and as the amusement spread, the three men forgot their injured dignity and began to see the comic aspect of the *Commodore's* arrival under licensed pilotage.

'She does not steer like a Rhine barge,' the pilot said by way of explanation.

'It *isn't* a Rhine barge,' one of the customs men pointed out as he heaved to shove the bows away from the side of the cutter. And the next time Kopf came that way, he suggested, the signal tower should fire rockets to warn the crews of all the cutters to abandon ship immediately.

Now that the atmosphere was more relaxed, we showed our passports, chatted for a while of the Rhine and the *Commodore*, then took our leave and turned back into the river. Kopf was still a trifle shaken, not so much by his error of judgment but by the indignity of having chosen a stationary customs inspection vessel upon which to carry out his mistake. Soon, however, his embarrassment faded, and he began to chuckle until he was so overcome by laughter — and perhaps by relief that he had not smashed in the windows of the cutter's wheelhouse — that he kept wiping the tears from his eyes.

'*Donnerwetter!*' he kept repeating. 'That I had to choose them, of all people. All the same, she does *not* swing round like a Rhine ship.'

And when, in the dark, we could see through the gap in the bank to the reflections of the quayside lights shining towards us down the long entrance channel leading to the port of Karlsruhe, he handed over the wheel. We might prefer, he said with a smile, to steer through the entrance ourselves, just to be sure we reached the jetties in safety.

## II

*The margrave's rest — the river laboratory — Baden-Baden waters — Paracelsus and the giant — the dwellers in the Mummelsee — the blessed margrave — protection from earthquakes — downstream to Mannheim — into the Neckar*

Karlsruhe did not just happen. It was founded by one of the species of the lesser margrave, and the story tells how he happened to be dissatisfied with his palace at Durlach — or, more correctly, with the people of that small town — and had in mind to transfer the margraval residence to a less restricting situation, to some spot which would give him the opportunity to realize to the full the architectural ambitions which very properly stirred in his aristocratic and baroque heart. Riding out from his castle for a day of hunting in the Hardtwald forest he happened to become separated from his retinue, and sitting down upon the stump of an oak-tree he went to sleep.

It is usual in such tales for the margrave to be awakened by a hermit, a white stag, a beautiful but languishing maiden or the devil in a frock-coat, yet for some reason none of these apparitions visited him. He slept very soundly indeed, and when at last his hunting companions found him he opened his eyes and declared that never before in all his life had he slept so peacefully. This, therefore, would be the spot on which his new demesne should be established, and because he had rested so sweetly he, the Margrave Karl Wilhelm, would call it *Karls Ruhe*, or Charles's Rest. A church would be built over the stump in commemoration of his afternoon nap, and there he would eventually be buried.

The new château was indeed built, and so was the church in the crypt of which Karl Wilhelm was in due time laid to rest. It has long since vanished, but in the nineteenth century the Archduke Ludwig Wilhelm, in whose territory the margraval district was

then incorporated, had a pyramid erected in Egyptian style — though on a more prudently economical scale — as a vault for Karl Wilhelm's remains. This curious and exotic monument still stands at the tram-stop in the centre of the city, and as the last resting place of Karl Wilhelm it is in fact *Karlsruhe*.

Whether or not he fell asleep when hunting, the Margrave Karl Wilhelm did in fact found Karlsruhe in the year 1715, when he chose to build in the forest a combined hunting lodge and formal residence to replace his palace at Durlach, which had been destroyed in the War of the Spanish Succession. Wishing it to be the centre of a new settlement he issued far and wide a proclamation that any who chose to move thither would be given freedom from taxes for several years and would also receive a free building site and timber. This unusually handsome offer attracted people from many lands, and a new town was quickly established.

Karl Wilhelm lived in the right era to be a man of baroque, and this meant very much more than just being inclined towards flamboyant ornamentation. It involved a detailed geometrical plan for the community, and in place of the humility of the individual in comparison with the height and sober majesty of gothic construction, there was a deliberate cultivation of breadth and splendour, of light and air. Freedom of expression was permitted in the finer detail of architecture, but only in so far as it did not interfere with the proportions of the whole grand plan of the margraval or episcopal, or royal patron. Breadths and lengths of streets, lawns, rivers and ornamental canals, even the shape and position of trees and hedges, everything within the orbit of the baroque patron had to conform to his basic plan, and if necessary any hills or other unfortunately intrusive features of the landscape would be removed. The patron of the age of baroque would stand no nonsense from nature, whatever licence he might allow to his own interior decorators, and those who came to settle within the framework of the scheme were obliged to adopt certain prescribed dimensions for their houses. Window sizes, the height and proportions of doors and arches and gables, all were ordained according to the master plan, and compared with more recent town-planning the effect was often extremely satisfying.

But the patron was more than a town planner. He himself was the centre of all things bright and beautiful, and though his chubby angels might spiral up to heaven on the pillars of the church, the patron's own residence was the thing to which the eye of the visitor — and of the townsman, too — was ingeniously and subtly to be drawn. Not that the subtlety was particularly marked at Karlsruhe, for Karl Wilhelm's planning put his splendid residence at the centre of a compass rose of radiating streets and forest rides, no less than thirty-two of which converged upon the mansion. It is these which have determined the lay-out of the inner part of the city ever since.

At the time of its foundation Karlsruhe stood four miles back from the Rhine, the loops and coils of which were continually shifting to one side or other of a bed several miles across, and it was not until a century later than the engineer Tulla took the river in hand and cut the new course across all the loops to form the line of the Rhine as it is today. This 'correction' took nearly sixty years to complete, and if it saved farms and villages from inundation its effect upon shipping was very different from what he had intended, for when similar works were extended further along the river it came to flow so swiftly in its straighter channel that navigation was extremely difficult. For many years the Rhine above Mannheim became practically devoid of shipping, and the merchants of Baden seriously contemplated cutting a lateral canal all the way from Mannheim to Kehl. At last, however, the river was 'regulated' as well as 'corrected'. Training walls and groins slowed the current and yet allowed the flooding river to rise above them and fill a wider channel, and navigation was much improved. At the beginning of the twentieth century the harbour at Karlsruhe was built, and its five huge basins now handle more than ten thousand ships a year, most of them carrying coal from the Ruhr and returning down river unladen. There are no passenger services apart from river trips to Mannheim and Heidelberg or to Strasbourg, though before the railway came to the Rhine valley one could take the morning coach to a landing-stage at the river bank and there board one of the great paddle-wheelers bound for Strasbourg or Cologne, with occasional connections to the Port of London.

Karlsruhe is not a beautiful place, but it has its attractions. Karl Wilhelm's baroque palace is still to be seen, and the radial lay-out around it is imposing. There is also an excellent opera, and a museum with several Grünewalds, including the famous crucifixion from the altar of Tauberbischofsheim. The city also basks in the glory of being the birthplace of Carl Benz, who in his student days at Karlsruhe continually dreamed of the possibility of taking the railway locomotive away from its rails to make a horseless carriage of the streets. Another local inventor was von Sauerbronn, who was the first to invent the 'riding-wheel' or hobby-horse, the forerunner of the bicycle. Indeed, after its first margraval period Karlsruhe was always a place of technology and industry, and its Technical College is well known throughout Germany today.

The visitor to Russia will no doubt call at plenty of tractor factories, differential gear assembly plants, pig-swilling stations and technical colleges, but this is only because a higher authority has decreed that these things are good for him, a healthy complement to a round which might otherwise embrace only stuffed proletarian leaders and churches transformed into cultural museums. Nobody in their senses, one might think, would of their own accord seek out a technical institute for sheer interest, and yet the *Commodore* had her own particular affection for the Karlsruhe college because it contains a department of river engineering, equipped with experimental models of parts of the Rhine as well as of sections of rivers in other parts of the world which present particularly knotty problems in urgent need of solution. In fact, there are two such laboratories in the city, for the Water and Navigation Department of the Bundesrepublik has its own research institute, where the designs for new and projected waterways such as the canalized Mosel and the Rhine-Main-Danube ship canal are tested on scale models. Because the next day happened to mark the beginning of a bank holiday period we only had the opportunity to see one of the river laboratories, and we chose that of the Technical College.

It is a most curious and somewhat unreasonable fact that if a river system or an estuary or a sea area is built up of mud and plaster on a laboratory floor, its area reduced to the diminutive

proportions of a scale model and probably distorted in the vertical plane by a factor of ten or twenty, the shifting sands and the silting, the flow of surface currents and bottom streaming, the eddies and whirls and tidal slacks will all still reproduce themselves as copies of the conditions which obtain in the real thing. Regulating taps replace tributaries, a long coil is set in place of a section of river in which nobody happens to be particularly interested, the tide comes once in twelve minutes instead of once in rather more than twelve hours, and perhaps the gravel of the bottom is replaced by coal dust and the floating debris by ping-pong balls, but still the thing works. Why, is one of those peculiar mysteries of science — or perhaps of the nature of water itself.

Our visit to the Karlsruhe river laboratory was like a journey through time and space, and we could walk in a few seconds along reaches of river which would take the *Commodore* herself hours to negotiate, and we might watch the silting of years take place within a few minutes. Dr Partensky demonstrated to us some of the experiments concerned with Rhine navigation, such as the problem of building a bridge at Schaffhausen which would be passable for shipping where the depth in midstream is as great as that of a major lake. Then there was the question of the point and mole above Oberwesel harbour, where a new shape would help to send the Rhine on its way without pausing to drop the suspended silt in the entrance to the port. And perhaps of even greater interest to ourselves, the knotty problem of preventing surges at the head of the locks on the Rhine-Main-Danube ship canal, part of the overland route from Rotterdam to the Black Sea due to be completed in 1969.

Except in the Rhine itself, any fall in level of a German river is taken and put to good use for generating electricity, and on the Main each of the weirs which deepen the river for navigation has its power station attached. The river water comes streaming through the strainers, roars between the blades of the turbines and foams out into the pool below, but any sudden reduction in the power used in the neighbourhood will cause the generator to be shut off. A factory may stop manufacture at the close of a working day, or perhaps it is bed-time and the end of telly-for-tonight for the

villagers. And if, as a result, the power station is cut out of the supply to the grid, this is natural enough, for generators do not just spin their fabric of amps and volts regardless of whether the stuff can be sold. The electricity has to be carried off and used, as surely as the production line of an automobile factory cannot continue manufacturing unless the finished products are cleared from the end of the assembly system. The unfortunate electrons sent whizzing along the copper conductors at 186,281 miles per second must have somewhere to go or else, it seems, they become frustrated and hot-headed and burn the place down. And so, when the juice is not wanted the dynamo has to be halted, and this is done by closing the sluices. In fact, the intake is designed to close automatically, but no man can actually halt the flow of the river as it streams towards the hydro-electric machinery. Surging down towards the power station, bubbling with anxiety to have the opportunity to spin the knife-edge blades of the turbines, the water finds itself speeding towards a solid wall and its steam-roller weight can only bounce back and set off upstream again as a disgruntled hump which eventually peters out.

This wave, not unlike a miniature tidal bore, will only be a few inches high and it is hardly enough to give hiccups to a sleeping duck, but it so happens that to one side of the power station there will be a long mole and beyond it the entrance to the lock by which ships can pass the step of the weir. Here a couple of heavy barges may be moored whilst the crew are playing *skat* in the nearby inn, or the skipper's wife is busy cutting up stewing beef and boiling it for next day's lunch. The surge will sweep powerfully round the tip of the promontory and heave the ships upwards and forwards. The stew may not be upset, but it is more than likely that the hawsers will part as they snap taut, or if the lines are slacker a boat may be sent careering into its neighbour. It may even run down the gates of the lock.

In the hydraulics laboratory we were shown a scale model of one of these weirs and locks, with a pair of trim model ships moored in the cut. The weir would be suddenly closed, the water would rise and rebound from the gates, but instead of being heaved forward to snap their lines the barges stayed as tranquil as could be.



This was because holes had been cut in the mole, their breadth being gradually increased until Dr Partenscky and his colleagues had achieved what they wanted — two equal surges reaching the ships at precisely the same moment, but coming from opposite directions. The barges would rise a little, but that was of no consequence. They continued to float serenely alongside the wall and their hawsers lay slack and steady. Even the *Commodore* might have lain peacefully asleep when the power station closed its intake as the villagers for miles around turned out their lights for the night and left the darkness to the nightingales and the owls.

In the course of our journey down the Rhine from Kehl to Karlsruhe it had been impossible to stop. We could indeed have turned and stemmed the current, but there were no quaysides of any description and, even if there had been a mooring-place it would have been neither safe nor comfortable to leave the *Commodore* tossing on the astonishing wash set up by the passing ships, thrusting against the flow on their way to Strasbourg and Basle. At best we might have sounded our way into a deserted backwater formed by a loop of the old course of the river or perhaps have rested among the flock of customs cutters at Neuburgweier, but in any case the places we wished to visit lay well back from the stream and at the foot of the range of hills of the northern Black Forest which lay invitingly away to our right. Among them was Baden-Baden, out of sight but beckoning to us with its lure of hot baths, and as it had been a favourite resort of all the top people from Russian czardom to Arabian oil sheiks it seemed respectable enough for ourselves. Yet when we visited it from Karlsruhe, it was only to find our hopes of hot baths frustrated by the bank holiday and we could merely drink the famous waters where they gushed hot and steamy from ornamental fountains in the parks and streets. Whether or not it rejuvenated our livers, it at least tasted quite pleasant.

Baden-Baden, the meeting place even today of the somewhat faded elegance of Europe, was beloved of the Romans, and there can be little doubt that many of them were sorely in need of a bout of therapy. Baths for emperors and common soldiery were

once ranged among the temples and villas of Civitas Aurelia Aquensis, and their remains are still to be seen. The Alemanni — who seem to have had little use for hot water — destroyed the baths, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the establishments were re-opened, to achieve world renown as the place to which the most distinguished invalids and hypochondriacs would gather to gamble at the newly dedicated casino and take their carefully regulated dips at 68° Centigrade in waters containing everything from titanium salts to bromides, iodides, and traces of rubidium and caesium — elements which at that time were still undiscovered. But even when there were no baths the springs were still in use, for that strange character Paracelsus was among those who subscribed a testimonial to the curative powers of the waters of Baden-Baden. 'That the sick may be healed,' he wrote, 'God has so ordered his creation that more power is to be found in spring waters than in learned letters, and the hot waters of Baden are more complete than others.'

Of Dr Frastus (for the name of the physician alchemist was Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim and he merely considered himself *para* to Celsus, the Roman physician) many tales have survived. That he came very near to recognizing the properties of anaesthetics is certain, for he fed to hens a substance which he prepared from vitriol and which caused them to sleep for a long time and awake uninjured. This 'extract of vitriol' must certainly have been ether. But much stranger is the account of his journey through the forest, probably after his setting himself up as a medical lecturer at Basle had so roused the rival medical interests that he had to flee from the city. On his way through the Black Forest, the story relates, he heard a little voice calling him by his name and asking to be released. Looking around, he at length discovered a phial hanging on a branch, very much like a glass ball hung on a Christmas tree.

Paracelsus removed the stopper, and out of the bottle there popped a more than full scale man, a giant who carried under his arm some books of magic. This unexpected apparition thanked the Herr Doktor kindly for his help, handed him the books and declared his intention of endowing him with wealth and happiness.

Paracelsus calmly replied that he had seen the fellow come out of the glass, but he did not for one moment believe that he was clever enough to slip inside it again. With his ability thus challenged, the giant slid back into the phial, and Dr Frastus quickly put back the stopper. In spite of threats and entreaties he went off with the books, leaving their owner where he had found him.

When many years later Paracelsus lay dying — as the result, it was rumoured, of one of the many attempts of his rivals to poison him — he ordered his servant to throw the volumes of magic into the Rhine, together with his chemicals and preparations. At first, the man only pretended to do so, but the doctor finally persuaded him with threats, and the whole collection was cast into the river, which at once seethed and boiled with their potency. And if by any chance one of the vessels cast into the water was a carboy of sulphuric acid, then perhaps this part of the story has at least some slight foundation.

The violent and irascible alchemist and doctor was not the first to leave his testimony to the excellence of Baden-Baden's waters, for a votive stone is still to be seen which records the thankfulness of a Roman father for the cure of his son. And of course the springs were certainly there long before the Romans, even if they remained undeveloped until Marcus Aurelius took them in hand. Geologists and mineralogists may talk of faults and fissures, porous and impervious layers, and of the heating of ground water at a depth of so many thousand feet, but local tradition knows very much better. The springs were the reward given to a cowherd by one of the strange inhabitants of the Mummelsee, that dark and deep lake of mystery lying high in the hills behind the town, a sheet of blackish blue water which has often been the scene of strange manifestations. And if any should doubt that this is no ordinary lake or that the water itself is, if not deuterium oxide, at least something more than ordinary  $H_2O$ , he can go there and discover for himself whether or not it is true that odd numbers of stones or any other objects let down into its depths in a bundle are transformed into evens, and evens are similarly changed into odds, or that stones cast into the water will sink, but during the following night will all be returned to the bank, carried thither by the

watermannikins — who do not like to have people throwing stones into their domain.

The Mummelsee is a favourite abode of these kindly people, and of the lake-wives who live at the bottom along with them. That they keep cattle under water is strange, but if Loch Ness has its monster why should not the Mummelsee have its cows? Whether or not they are often to be seen, there was the occasion when some Black Forest cowherds were tending their own domestic cattle on the meadows sloping back from the water and a black bull rose from the water, swam to the shore, and casually joined the herd of the villagers. The men seem not to have been particularly astonished, for no doubt they were accustomed to such sights, nor were they in the least put out when a watermannikin — not a merman, for such are only found in the sea, and this was of course a freshwater species — rose from the water and called to the bull to return. The obstinate animal paid no attention to its owner, and so the watermannikin politely asked two of the herdsmen to be so very kind as to help him to round up the beast and drive it back to its watery home. The men readily agreed, and they quickly had the bull separated from the land herd. As soon as they had driven it to the shore, the creature plunged into the water and disappeared below the waves.

The water-dweller, who was dressed in rat skins and seems in some ways to have resembled an otter, thanked the men and presented each of them with a stone which, he said, would produce a hot and healing spring wherever it was thrown down. Somewhat incredulous perhaps, the cowherds took the stones and for a long time they forgot about them. But in the course of time one of the herdsmen was walking across the hills above where the valley opened out towards the plain of the Rhine, and when he sat down to rest he amused himself by taking the stone from his pocket and rolling it down the hillside, just as any cowman might be tempted to do. The throw was an excellent one, and as it sped on its way towards the valley bottom the stone bounced three times. At each point the earth opened, and the promise of the lake dweller was properly fulfilled. Hot and healing water trickled from the cleft, and today at those same spots are the bathing establishments

complete with specialist doctors, masseuses, mud plasterers, sprays, douches, and all the proper equipment of a Kur institution.

At the entrance to the valley in which lies Baden-Baden with its castle and hotels, its lawns and walks and the extremely handsome Kurhaus where the orchestra plays to the visitors and patients, there stands among the trees high on the corner of the hill the ruined keep of Hohenbaden castle. From the top there is a wide view across the plain of the Rhine, and over the valley of the Oos to another ruined tower, the Yburg, of which it is said that the numerous ghosts have the rather endearing habit of passing some of the time of waiting for the last judgment in playing skittles in the ruined court. If a nocturnal visitor is particularly fortunate he may be asked to join one of the teams, and such an invitation should never be hastily declined, for if when the rest of the party vanishes at first light one is still holding a ball it will be found to have turned to solid gold.

Hohenbaden castle has everything from wicked mistresses to a grey lady who wails on stormy nights and a white one whose glance is fatal. But in the ruins of a small room above the great hall there is an altar and a statue of a young nobleman, the blessed (*seliger*) Margrave Bernhard of Baden. Wondering just why he happened to be blessed, we discovered that his days of limited blessedness were soon to be over, and that he was shortly to become not just *selig* but *heilig*, or holy. The young margrave had stumped the country at the beginning of the fourteenth century, intent on raising for the Hohenstaufen Emperor a force of nobles and knights who would ride against the Turks in a fresh Crusade. He had not proceeded very far, however, when he contracted the plague and died near Turin. The idea of the Crusade faded, but the tomb of the margrave became a centre of pilgrimage, and because various cures were said to have been wrought there he was duly declared *selig*.

To be upgraded from blessed to holy and acquire the courtesy title of 'Saint' it was necessary for a specified number of properly attested wonders to be wrought, and by a curious misfortune the Margrave of Baden had logged one too few to qualify for the higher grade. So it came about that for centuries he was to remain the

Blessed Margrave Bernhard, and no more. But the people of Baden had no indigenous saint of their own, whereas Alsace to the west and Franconia to the north had plenty. To be saintless was a reproach, particularly when Bernhard had only failed by such a narrow margin, and when the opportunity came the Badeners decided to make an effort. In 1958 Cardinal Roncalli was elected as Pope John XXIII, and knowing him to be a sympathetic and internationally-minded person someone started a petition. In no time at all thousands of signatures were obtained to a respectful request that His Holiness would overlook the margrave's shortage, very much as university examiners might allow a student 'to proceed as though he had passed', and to the great delight of the Catholics of Baden the Pope agreed that in July of 1961 the margrave should duly be made *heilig*.

This same Margrave Bernhard is the subject of one of the ornamental fountains which decorate the main street of the nearby town of Rastatt, a delightful little piece of baroque laid out in fine style for the Margrave Ludwig Wilhelm, whose palace with its fat cherubs swarming over the doorways and buxom goddesses sitting nonchalantly on the cornices stands at the end of an avenue of aged mulberry trees. A second fountain is more in the nature of an insurance, for it is to Alexius, a saint with the unusual property of protecting his devotees against earthquakes. This particular danger, one might suspect, would not be among those most heavily overshadowing the good people of Rastatt or their margraves, and yet the track of the upper Rhine shows evidence enough of volcanic activity. The Kaiserstuhl hills near Freiburg are typical excrescences thrust up from the stiffly molten interior of the earth — though it hardly seems chivalrous to describe in such terms a miniature group of mountains of such enchanting beauty, where the swallow-tail butterflies flit across the hot slopes and over vines which produce wines as fine as any grown in so expert a land of viticulture as Germany. The Siebengebirge near Bonn are another volcanic family of hills, and in the fourteenth century there was a quake in Alsace sufficient to kill sixteen thousand people in Strasbourg, if the chronicler of that city is to be believed. And so, when one of the margraves built the fountain and added a prayer

that Alexius would protect Rastatt from earth tremors, he may have been moved by genuine anxiety. Or perhaps he realized how expensive it would be to replace the castle cherubs if they should be shaken from their perches.

The third fountain, the Johannesbrunnen, is perhaps the most delicate of the three, and its gay scrolls of ironwork and the red sandstone cupola are topped by the gentle figure of John of Pomuk, who, as the patron saint of bridges, we were often to meet along the course of the River Main in Bavaria. It was not, however, as 'the Pearl of Baroque' that Rastatt interested us, for we were to see more and finer examples of the baroque planner's work in Franconia. Rastatt was the place where the treaty was signed which confirmed and extended to the Rhine the principle of free navigation laid down by a decree of the Revolutionary Council a few years earlier for the Scheldt. The whole course of the river was declared to be the common property and inalienable right of *all* the nations across whose territories it flowed, and none might impede others from enjoying the same advantages as themselves. This principle was the death warrant of the private toll stations all down the Rhine, and if their levies were quickly replaced by smaller dues paid to any one of a dozen collecting stations between Strasbourg and Holland, at least the boatmen had the satisfaction of knowing that whatever they might be required to pay would be devoted to the improvement and repair of the channel. Had it not been for the French Revolution, the *Commodore's* journey downstream might have proved an expensive one unless, like the medieval merchants, she had been prepared to fight it out with crossbow and arquebus as the current sped her on her way.

'Everyone who claims to be intelligent must have spent some time in Karlsruhe,' Brahms is supposed to have declared. Whether or not he was right, our own visit there was not a lengthy one, for we wanted to leave the upper reaches of the Rhine behind us and enter the first of its navigable tributaries, the Neckar. With so much heavy traffic coming and going all along the river there was no point in taking a pilot. The river was still without navigation marks but we merely had to trail down behind another ship and so keep in the channel. Taking the *Commodore* out from the jetty we

moved down past the coal and refinery basins, to where we found a smart Rhine tanker gliding smoothly towards the port entrance. Drawing close alongside we politely asked the captain whether he would mind our using him as a travelling signpost, and we also enquired what his speed was likely to be. In fact, he was about to shoot downstream at nine knots, which was rather beyond the *Commodore's* athletics, but at least it meant that for the first hour the ship would not draw so far ahead of us that we should be unable to follow in its wake, and we were sure that within that time we should sight other craft heading in the same direction at a more leisurely pace. And so it proved, for just as we emerged from the entrance of the port a laden French vessel came wallowing down the river at precisely the speed which suited us.

Once again the grey river swept us along for mile after mile between its lines of poplars, carefully avoiding even the smallest hamlets as though anxious not to contaminate itself by contact with mere landmen. Somewhere away to our right lay the great palace of Bruchsal, but apart from an occasional ferry there was little sign of habitation until we drew close to Speyer which, like Strasbourg, the Rhine condescended to touch at one point but no more. It was late in the afternoon before we came in view of the outskirts of Mannheim-Ludwigshafen, with chemical factories on the left bank and on the right riverside parks and gardens where the Mannheimers were walking and swimming, airing their children and poodles or basking contentedly in the hot summer sun.

Mannheim is the first city north of Basle to be placed firmly on the river. Once a fishing hamlet at the confluence of Rhine and Neckar, the position had been fortified at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and after the Thirty Years War the Kurfürst (or Elector) decided to lay out a town at the same place. Christened *Mannheim*, or Home of Humanity, it quickly drew to it religious refugees from Flanders, Wallonia and Piedmont, for it offered freedom of worship to men and women of any nationality. From all over Germany other settlers flocked to the liberal city, and it was this influx of protestant workers and craftsmen from many different lands which was to be the foundation of Mannheim's prosperity.



Today Mannheim is second only to Duisburg among the inland ports of Europe, and though the palace of the Kurfürst and the neat geometrical lay-out of the streets reminds the visitor that the city was once established in grand style, it is as a city of shipping that Mannheim has achieved its modern fame. Nearly thirty miles of quays stretch along the two rivers and the basins which lead from them, and the Rhine as it flows between the silos and warehouses and under the jibs of the stork-like cranes which straddle the dockside railway tracks is as fine an industrial waterscape as a modern artist could wish to find.

Intent on reaching the tributary we did not draw in even for a moment at Mannheim's dusty wharves, but tossing on the bow-waves of the bustling tugs and threading our way between the ships at anchor and the barge trains threshing up on either side of them, we edged across to the right-hand shore and followed it down to where it tapered away to a point. Swinging round below the mud-bank at the tip, we were in the dark blackish-brown water of the Neckar, overlain here with a film of coal dust blown from the grabs of the unloaders.

Beyond the first lock at Feudenheim a stretch of canal led round to cut off a meander of the river, and as the sun set in a blaze of reddish gold behind the low hills beyond the Rhine astern of us, we passed under the high embankment of the Autobahn to see the dim outline of the foothills flanking the Odenwald on its western side. Here and there the lights of farmsteads and cottages winked on their slopes, but it was too late for us to hope to reach Heidelberg that evening. Emerging from the canal into the broader waters of a country river we came to where two villages faced each other across the stream, Ladenburg on our left and Neckarhausen opposite. At the latter we could make out the remains of what had once been a quay, and sounding our way cautiously through the reed beds and between the banks of shingle which lay to the side of the channel we crept round behind the tether-buoy of the village ferry, shone our searchlight upon the bank, and drew in towards the sedge-lined shore at the bottom of the tumbled wall. Within a minute or two the older men of the village were there to take our lines and welcome us to their forgotten hamlet, to recom-

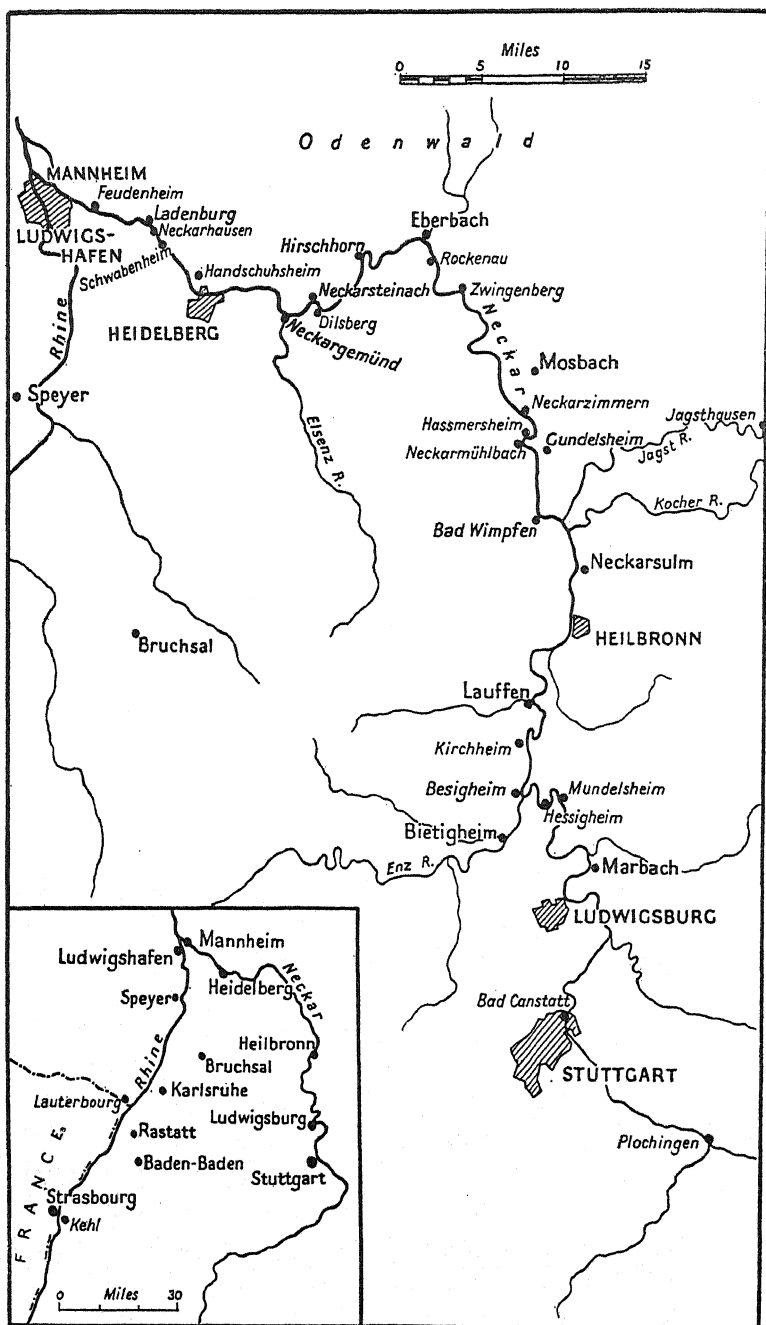
mend especially the wine at the inn, ask us whether we had crossed the Channel, tell us where milk could be obtained in the morning, comment on the glorious weather, and enquire if they could help us in any further way. Then, as the stars shone and the dew began to moisten our deck, they wished us goodnight and left us to dream of what might lie ahead of us up the winding reaches of this lovely stream of southern Germany.

### III

*Ladenburg — the lion's chain — dangers to mariners —  
Heidelberg — the patron of bridges — robber barons of the  
Neckar — Neckarsteinach and Dilsberg — the character of  
the Odenwald — the fate of the lords of Hirschhorn — the  
Neckar navigation*

Neckarhausen is now a sleepy little village. The grass and rushes which grow over the tumbled stones of its former quayside provide a quiet home for the ducks and moorhens which saunter out to snabble among the waterweeds trailing in the slow current over the gravel banks and shoals, which extend almost half way across the river to where the dredged channel on the outside of the bend carries the heavily laden ships appropriate to a Class IV Federal Waterway. None of these ships, German and Swiss, French and Dutch and Belgian, draw in at Neckarhausen, nor could they do so if they wished to, for the water is too shallow. Yet Neckarhausen was once a busy little town of barge-skipppers and horse-towage teams, before the coming of steam, and later diesel, changed the character of the shipping so that it had no further business with the village. Only the ferry has not changed, and even if the canalization of the Neckar has obliged it to adopt a motor instead of swinging across on the current, it still chugs slowly to and fro on its voyages between Neckarhausen and Ladenburg very much as it did in the year 1274 — when its existence was first officially noted. For although the smart expresses of the Bundesbahn roar across the sandstone bridge to ignore both Ladenburg and Neckarhausen with a disdainful hiss of the sparks flashing from their pantographs, the road traffic has nothing so new-fangled as a bridge to carry it across the stream.

Ladenburg is larger than Neckarhausen and is a town of attractive timbered buildings, towered gateways, and little bits of bishop's



palace and other residences from the days when it had a greater importance than it has now. It was originally a Celtic stronghold and later became a wealthy and prosperous residential settlement for Roman businessmen and administrators who, although their vintners had imported vines to the neighbouring hillside at Schriesheim, preferred to serve at their own dinner tables the upper class wines of Spain, brought from the far south by baggage train.

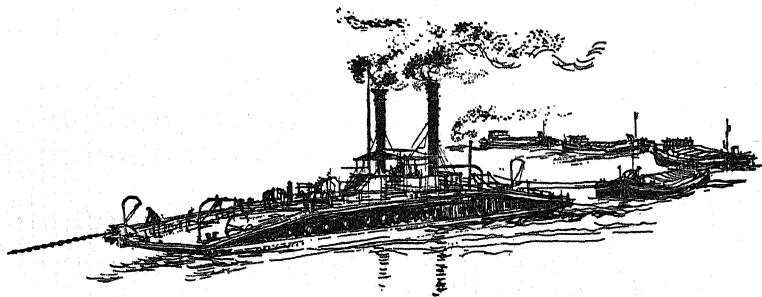
Coloured lines of stone crossing the market place and pavements around the church of St Gallus trace out the foundations of what was to have been the largest Roman church north of the Alps, with the exception of the great basilica at Trier on the Moselle. Three huge naves it would have had if it had ever been completed, but the building was not far advanced when in the year 260 the Germanic tribes swooped down from the Odenwald and razed Roman Lopodunum to the ground. Little remains of the Roman buildings, except for the characteristic square-hewn stones which are to be seen in the walls of many a house throughout the town.

One of the more curious structures in Ladenburg is a turreted and machicolated four-square structure which looks very much like a keep to which the local people might have driven their cattle when threatened by raiders. In fact it is the oldest garage in the world, for it was built by Carl Benz to accommodate his horseless carriages in suitably impressive style. Perhaps the most beautiful of all the buildings is the local museum, a fine Renaissance house with carved galleries open to the street. And here it was not the remains of the Celts or Romans or Jesuits which attracted our attention so much as a yard or more of heavy chain hanging from a nail in a beam. Was it, could it be a part of *the* chain, we asked? And the curator assured us that it was indeed a short length of the famous *Kette*, preserved for posterity when the chain was collected from the river in 1935 and taken away to be melted down — the end of a curious chapter in the history of the Neckar valley. It was to this chain that the famous Lion of Handschuhsheim was tethered.

The village of Handschuhsheim lies at the very edge of the foothills of the Odenwald and it is now continuous with the suburbs of Heidelberg. Local tradition relates that it was there, on a spring

morning in 1878, that the villagers trembled to hear the roaring and growling of a ferocious beast, somewhere down in the valley beyond the woods. It was generally known that a circus was playing at Mannheim, a mere ten miles away, and the people of Handschuhsheim at once realized that a lion, or possibly several, had escaped from the cages and was roving up the valley, tearing to pieces every living thing in its path. As the roaring of the beast and the screams of its terrified victims grew continually louder, the women and children were ordered to lock themselves in their houses for safety, whilst the less timid of the men armed themselves with pitchforks, flails, scythes and such implements of battle as their houses could furnish and set off through the woods under the leadership of a gamekeeper.

The sound of the fearful beast grew ever louder as the men marched towards the Neckar, ready if need be to die in the jaws of the lion rather than have their loved ones devoured by the raging animal. But when at last they emerged from the trees where the open fields led down to the river bank, they stopped short. Creeping up the valley was no carnivore but a curious ship, a long black vessel with smoke belching from its two slender funnels set side by side. Behind it a string of barges hung in the current, and the roars and screams were no more than the creaks and groans of the winches and capstans on the monster's deck as it clawed its way up the Neckar by hauling a chain out of the water below its bow, passing it round drums and pulleys to drop it into the river once more at the stern. The creature was in fact the first of the seven *Kettenschiffe* or chain-ships of the newly formed Neckar Chain-Towage Company.



The intrepid hunters dispersed and made their way back to the village, where no doubt their womenfolk were greatly relieved to know that any immediate danger of death was past. But the tale of their sortie could not be kept from others in the neighbourhood, and one of the chain-ships was promptly given the name of *Hendsemer Löb*, dialect for *Handschuhsheimer Löwe*, or the *Lion of Handschuhsheim*. Another was to be known as the *Neckaresel*, or donkey, on account of the braying sounds which it emitted, and although these intriguing vessels are no longer in existence the traveller who is curious to know just what they were like can see an excellent picture of one of them painted on the outside wall of the ferryman's cottage at Zwingenberg, further up the river. Or, if he prefers to drink a glass of wine in the '*zum Kettenboot*' at Eberbach, he can see there a model of one of these curious beasts of the river.

The chain-system was not an invention of the Neckar valley. It had already been used on many other waterways where the course was tortuous and shallow and unsuited to screw or paddle-ships, or where other special conditions made it a particularly suitable means of propulsion — as on three watershed levels of French canals, and in the Ham tunnel on the Meuse, where there was so strong a current that poling was impossible and where the lack of a tow-path in the tunnel prevented the use of horses. Besides, theoretical calculations showed that where the gradient was steeper than 1 in 3,300 chain-towage was the most economical form of haulage — even if not the most convenient, particularly when the chain parted and the ends had to be recovered with grappling irons and linked up again by the smiths aboard the chain-ship. For these various reasons, at one time or another chains were in use on the Seine, on the Rhine between Bonn and Bingen, and on the Elbe. This last was four hundred and seven miles long, and it was laid in a single piece from Hamburg to Usti in Czechoslovakia.

The Neckar chain along which the lion and donkey and their fellows hauled themselves was seventy-nine miles in length, and it was laid in the shallow river bed all the way from Mannheim to the harbour of Heilbronn. To make such a length of chain was no easy task, and smiths from France and Britain as well as from Germany

were brought over to forge the millions of links required. But the real difficulty of the system was that the chain-ships on the Neckar used the chain when travelling both upstream and down, whereas the Royal Bavarian chain-tugs on the Main used it for the upstream journey only and were equipped with their own propulsion for the return. As there were seven ships all operating at once on the Neckar chain, a tow-train moving upstream was certain to meet one or more of its fellows returning from Heilbronn, and whenever this occurred the *Bergschiff* bound upstream dropped anchor and the crew had to open up its 'cow-mouth' through which the chain came up over the bows, unwind the links from the capstans amidships, release it at the stern too, and then carry the whole affair across the vessel and over the machinery to drop it in the river. When the *Talschiff* had glided by, out came the grappling irons and the chain was fished up, hoisted aboard, and re-threaded through the winding gear so that the tow-train might proceed on its way once more.

With the canalization of the river the chain-ships were forced into retirement, and the *Commodore* had come to the Neckar thirty years too late to enjoy being hauled up the stream behind the roaring lion or the braying donkey. Instead, she could follow in the wake of the tankers bound for the port of Stuttgart, and leaving Neckarhausen she passed through the second lock at Schwabenheim to head for the cleft in the hills where the Neckar emerged from the forest of the Odenwald at Heidelberg.

A student of Heidelberg may still sing of how he has lost his heart *in Heidelberg, am Neckarstrand*, but the song was written long before the manufacturers of detergents had begun their fierce struggle to make their own products more foamy than those of their rivals. Today one is more likely to lose one's life than one's heart, for the locks are so filled with film-star foam shampoo that a deck-hand falling overboard will almost certainly be smothered before he can be located below the mass of froth and hauled out. People have in fact been drowned in the Neckar precisely in that way.

The river itself, fortunately enough, is not entirely decked in foam, and the trouble arises only at the locks, many of which are



very deep. The first, at Feudenheim, has a fall of more than thirty feet, and Schwabenheim is only a little less deep. By the time it reaches them the Neckar has flowed past many villages where the local people, dutifully following the admonitions of the advertisers, have washed their socks and shirts, cutlery and china, in the most foaming products obtainable, and the effluents have been sent to swell the water carried down from Swabia. When this solution pours through the paddles of the lock-gates it froths to such an extent that freshwater hoses have to be used to drive the spume from the machinery and locksides, whilst the pen itself is feet deep in a bubbling mass which wells up around the ship and has to be washed off on leaving the lock if the paintwork is not to be stained by a sticky pinkish residue. The *Commodore's* saloon hatch is more than five feet above the waterline, but on the Neckar we were sometimes obliged to close the doors to prevent the foam spilling over the sill and down the steps into the saloon. On steaming out into the reach above the lock we had to make a circuit of the catwalk, splashing the sides with the dinghy oars and flinging buckets of water over the topsides to wash away the Father Christmas beards which hung from her upper works.

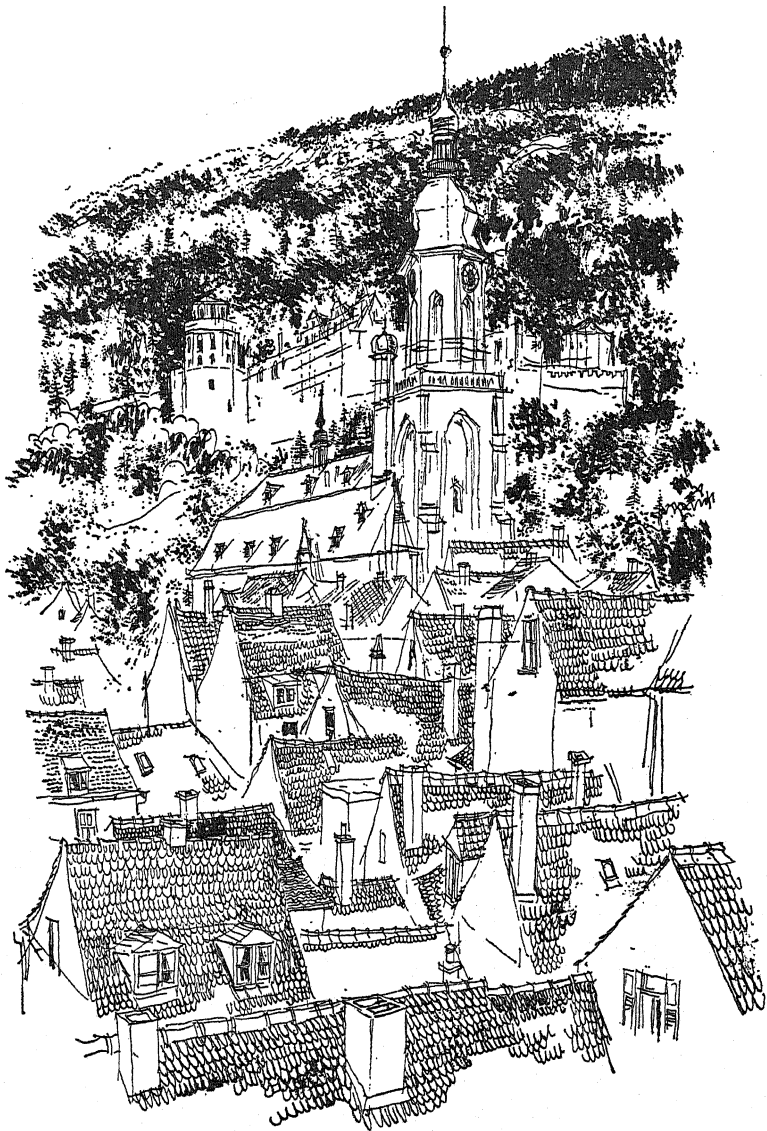
Death by detergent is not the only menace of which the barge-master must be wary as he steers his cargo of Ruhr coal up the winding course of the river. There is the Neckargeist, and there is the Hakenmann or hook-man, too. Whereas most of the spirits inhabiting the Odenwald are Nixen and other relatively harmless creatures content to squeak like wheel-barrows, sigh like the wind in the trees, or play mild jokes upon peasant women on their way to market, the Neckargeist is more formidable. On dark nights it will scream for help in mid-stream, shrieking in imitation of a drowning man, and if any should be so foolish as to plunge into the water in a gallant attempt at life-saving, the Neckargeist promptly seizes him and with a satisfied chortle drags him under. It attacks night-time swimmers too, and retains their bodies for three days before allowing them to float up from the bottom.

Apparently the Neckargeist only operates at night, especially around the season of midsummer, and it is quite distinct from the Hakenmann. This individual is armed with a long crook, which he

thrusts out of the water in order to drag into the stream and drown such children as may imprudently play on the river bank. And whereas the Neckargeist has never been known actually to attack the shipping, the Hakenmann is inclined to use his hook to shove the bow or stern out of its true direction so that the vessel runs on the rocks and is holed. Before the Neckar was canalized it was the regular practice for a skipper to cast an offering into the stream to buy him off, often tossing overboard a few of the logs from the cargo of Odenwald timber. And often enough the boatmen would place a few small coins on a customary tribute stone, in return for which the Hakenmann would grant them a safe passage down a particularly fleet and shoaled section of the stream known as the Steingerümpel. But now that the river is regulated and corrected with locks and weirs the greater depth of water has removed this particular danger, and although the bargemen still pay a few pfennigs by way of tribute, it is not to the Hakenmann but to the lock-keepers that they make their offering.

So famous is the city of Heidelberg from song and poetry and on account of the many great figures who have held posts at its ancient university, that visitors flock to it in their thousands, and few dare to go home until they have climbed the path to the castle and seen the gigantic wine-tuns. But if the city is crowded with sightseers, along the quay wall below the Old Bridge with its pretty turreted gateway a boat can lie in a pleasant and peaceful berth. The genial harbourmaster allocated the *Commodore* a stretch of wall beneath the trees of the promenade, complete with a private staircase and a gate to which he gave us the key, and there she was welcome to stay as long as we wished. Outside, the tow-trains hung in the slight current, waiting for the green lights to signal them to proceed to the lock ahead, and beneath the trees above us the modern *Homo heidelbergensis* out for an evening stroll along the promenade would look down upon our supper table and wish us a charming *guten Appetit* or *Mahlzeit* in that courteous way the Germans have.

Heidelberg must certainly be one of the most visited places of Europe, and a most attractive city it certainly is, even if it is now no longer only a quiet little university town. But to see Heidelberg



at its best one must row across the river in the early evening, and climb the narrow winding alley steps of the Schlangenweg to the height of the Philosophers' Walk and look out across the Neckar to where the ruins of the magnificent castle stand out from the trees on the hill above the Church of the Holy Ghost. Below, the mellow

tiled roofs are fading in the evening haze of wood smoke, but if one has chosen just the right moment and the proper meteorological conditions the rosy sandstone of the ruined wings of the castle glows warm and radiant in the last rays of light before the sun slides behind the hill and a sombre shadow falls across the view.

Though wistfully beautiful, the castle of Heidelberg is only a faint shadow of its former glory, and even the magnificent formal gardens are but a fragment of those that were laid out by Friedrich V for his Stuart bride, Elizabeth, the daughter of James I. Although the castle capitulated to Louis XIV and was promised immunity, the retreating French forces blew up many of its finest buildings and on their return four years later burned down most of the remainder during a drunken orgy. The loss to the city was tragic, and yet the Protestant Kurfürsts of the Palatinate seem to have accepted the disaster with resignation, viewing it as divine judgment on their line for the deed of their forebear Ludwig III who, at the Council of Constance, had ordered John Huss to be burned.

Without a dinghy one can reach the Philosopher's Walk by crossing the Old Bridge at the foot of the lock. Foolishly destroyed by the German army in 1945, this most beautiful of all the Neckar bridges has since been rebuilt in its original eighteenth-century form, a costly undertaking on the part of the citizens but certainly a wise one, for its six high arches of the same rosy stone of the Odenwald complete the beauty of Heidelberg in a way that no other bridge could have done. The Elector, Carl Theodor, who was originally responsible for building it, still stands proudly on a buttress on the townward side, whilst Pallas Athene watches over the Neuenheim end of the crossing. Beyond her, near the foot of the Schlangenweg, stands a statue of St John the Nepomucene, or Jan of Pomuk.

The figure of this Bohemian priest is more usually to be found right over the arch of a bridge, for he happens to be the patron saint of bridges — and also of those in danger of drowning if they fall in. In his capacity as bridge-protector he had always been a particular friend of the *Commodore* who had encountered him many times before on bridges from Flanders to Baden, and even at a distance she could always recognize him, not just from his

position but by his five-starred halo. The Nepomuk is probably the only saint to have a halo with a specific gravity of less than 1.0, and in confirmation of this unusual property it is said that when he was flung into the river Vltava at Prague his halo with five stars not only appeared as he sank, but actually floated.

As chaplain to the Queen of Bohemia, Jan of Pomuk incurred the wrath of her husband, King Wenceslas IV, a ruler who seems to have begun his reign moderately enough but to have turned tyrant and drunkard after an unsuccessful attempt had been made to poison him. It was to Jan that the Queen turned for advice in her constant work of caring for the sick and the poor in the city, and as her confessor he was naturally enough her trusted confidant. But, as so often happens, heavy drinking led the King to imagine that his queen was guilty of all manner of deceptions, and knowing that she would have revealed them to her confessor he summoned Jan and demanded to know the secrets entrusted to him in the confessional. Probably there were none, but Jan did not argue that particular point. He merely declared that he could not break his trust, upon which Wenceslas threatened him without avail, and then had him beaten, imprisoned, starved, and tortured. It was only the intervention of the Queen that saved his life — for a while.

Jan of Pomuk continued to serve the Queen, but one day the King in a fit of inebriate fury seized and tortured almost the entire clergy of Prague. He reserved his special wrath for the Queen's confessor; yet even when burned with red-hot irons Jan courageously refused to speak, whereupon he was dragged through the streets of Prague, horribly burned and mutilated. At the bridge his head was tied to his feet, and with his hands bound and his mouth forced open with a block of wood he was flung from the parapet, to the cheers of his royal master. It was then, the story tells, that the halo with five stars rose to the surface and floated away down the river towards the Elbe.

The Odenwald begins abruptly at Heidelberg, and for the next forty miles the river course winds through the deep sinuous cleft which it has cut for itself during the long centuries of eroding the red sandstone. All along its course the Neckar is flanked by the main road and the railway, and the half-timbered houses of its

hamlets shake to the roar of the passing traffic. Yet in spite of this it is a valley of exquisite beauty, and although there are eight great barrages across the forest section of the river they do not disfigure it. Great care has been taken to blend them with the landscape, and the local stone has been used with very good effect.

Upstream of Heidelberg lock the river passes the resort of Ziegelhausen, and beyond the next it sweeps round a bend to the little town of Neckargemünd, where the Elsenz flows dark and muddy into the main stream. High on the hill above it are the ruins of the castle of Reichenstein, formerly the domain of predatory barons, though most of the castle strongholds of the Neckar were the seats of lords and nobles who considered it their duty to protect the traffic which passed up the valley, rather than to plunder it. Once there lived in the Reichenstein a lord who had a daughter, Uta, and when he sallied out at night to attack travellers on the high road in the valley below, he would leave her locked in her room with only her pet raven for company.

One night when her father was thus occupied, Uta was surprised to see a face appear at her casement, a face she knew and did not particularly like, for it was that of the tough knight Bligger of Neckarsteinach, a suitor whose attentions she had continually rejected. A moment later he had leapt through the window panes into the room, determined that if she would not accept him of her own free will he would take her off by force. This he at once proceeded to do, and he dragged her down to the river bank, where he gripped her tightly and plunged into the water. Although she fought all the way across the stream, Bligger reached the opposite shore with his prize and hustled her up to his own robber's lair, the Schwalbennest (Swallow's nest) or Schadeck, overlooking the bend of the river at Neckarsteinach. There he thrust her into a tower and locked her in, to starve her into submission.

But in the morning Uta heard beyond the bars of her window the call of her pet raven which had been searching for her, and now that it had found her it brought to her nuts and wild fruit with which she managed to sustain herself. One day Bligger, who no doubt was becoming suspicious of her apparent endurance of starvation, saw the raven on its way with provisions and he stormed

to the cell and flung open the door to despatch the bird with an arrow. But the raven was too quick for him. Before he could draw his bow it dived at his face, pecking so ferociously at his eyes that the bold bad knight was forced to retreat before its onslaught, and stepping back just one step too far he fell backwards from the tower to the rocks below. Thus, it is said, died Bligger von Steinach, lamented by none; but to whom the fair Uta ultimately gave her hand, the story does not relate.

Standing at the confluence of the Steinach and the Neckar, Neckarsteinach is so small a place that one would hardly imagine that for eight centuries it has been a village of shippers. There is a shipyard on the bank upstream of the lock, and barges lie across the slipway, but the village itself has only a diminutive quayside, and apart from the *Commodore* and the Heidelberg trip boats none of the passing traffic seemed to have any desire to call there. And yet the name of the village can be seen painted on the sterns of ships ploughing up and down the Rhine, for Neckarsteinach is a place of shipmen and boasts the second largest privateer fleet in Germany, the only greater one being based on another village further upstream. More than fifty freighters scattered at any one moment over hundreds of miles of the Western European waterways have this sleepy Neckar village as their home port.

It is not the ships which one notices at Neckarsteinach — if only because they are not there. What endows the place with its particular attraction as it lies huddled on the narrow strip of land between the river and the foot of the curving tongue of the Riegelsberg hill, is that it is overtopped not just by the keep of one castle but by four, the former homes of the Bliggers and the Landschadens. One of the Bliggers was a notable medieval ballad singer and others went into the church, yet some were more in the tradition of the abductor of the fair Uta. They placed a chain across the Neckar in order to hold up shipping for plunder, and so notorious did they become that the Emperor himself was obliged to outlaw them. Overcome with what is said to have been remorse, one of the robber lords joined a Crusade under a false name and distinguished himself by a number of deeds of valour, including the decapitation of one of the Saracen leaders. Applauded by the Emperor for this

achievement, he revealed his identity and was pardoned for his earlier deeds. More than that, he was granted the right to show the bearded head of the Turk on his arms. In the evangelical church of Neckarsteinach he is to be seen on his memorial, handsomely decked out in his chain mail and holding his Crusader's sword, whilst at his side the head of his victim stares ferociously from the stone.

Two of the castles, the Vorderburg and Mittelburg, are still lived in, though not by the original family of ship-looters, but the other pair are ruined, their surviving towers peeping high enough from the trees to give magnificent views of the river stretching down towards Neckargemünd in the one direction and curving away to Lock 6 in the other. And beyond where the stream makes its sharp bend at the foot of the ridge there rises the 1300 foot Dilsberg topped by a perfect circle of walls, within which is cramped the most charming medieval hill village, the houses so closely packed that the walls seem to be bursting outward under their pressure.

On account of its excellent position, Dilsberg successfully withstood four onslaughts by the formidable Tilly, when he had already possessed himself of Neckarsteinach across the river. Indeed, the conical hill was such a perfect natural fortress that Dilsberg was rarely attacked by whatever enemy happened to be engaged in sacking the land, advancing up the Neckar valley in the turbulent seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to burn and plunder the villages. The ascent of the slopes was enough to exhaust even the heartiest troops, and they were usually thankful to leave the place unmolested. On one occasion, however, marauding forces managed to scale the hill, and after surrounding the village they began to mount an attack all round the circle of the walls. Scaling ladders were pushed up, and the outnumbered Dilsbergers were hard pressed to fight their attackers away from the parapet when one of the villagers thought of an ingenious weapon. All the skeps were hurriedly collected from the gardens, and after being thoroughly well shaken they were hurled down among the soldiers below. Very soon the entire force of besiegers was in headlong flight down the hillside, the soldiers flailing wildly with their arms, and



their faces already swollen with the furious onslaught of the villagers' bees.

It was from the top of the ruined keep in the centre of Dilsberg that we had our first proper view of the expanse of country into which the *Commodore* was carrying us. Away to the west the forest dropped erratically in folds and smooth humped ridges towards its limit at Heidelberg, and beyond lay the dim, misty width of plain, veiled in what we liked to imagine was the shimmering heat of a summer afternoon, but which in reality may well have been the smoke drifting across the land from the industries of Mannheim-Ludwigshafen. Somewhere in that blankness was the course of the Rhine itself, and though it was invisible from where we stood there rose far beyond it, like the first rough pencilled outlines of a scenery back-cloth, the hills of the Haardtgebirge. Further round to the southward we looked out across a patchwork upland of clumps of forest, broad golden bands of cornfields and dotted geometrical orchards, backed in the distance by the dark hills of the northern Black Forest. To the south-east the plateau dipped gently towards where Stuttgart hid somewhere behind its folds, but to the northward the magnificent Odenwald lay in row upon row of ridges, a solid humped carpet of dark pines and stately beeches through which only one or two distant hill-top domes of grass showed their smooth and aged heads, and without a trace of town or village or fields.

As we scanned the horizon from our position above the crinkled roofs of Dilsberg we realized perhaps for the first time something which was to strike us again and again on the Main and the Lahn, the Weser and the Fulda — that from the waist down to the feet Germany is a vast expanse of primitive forest in which man has laboriously cut a scattering of small clearings, to plant there his tiny and isolated villages, each surrounded by its acres of corn and barley and pasturage for the sleek fat cattle. Here and there, the rivers have gouged their winding valleys to a depth of hundreds of feet through the soft stone, but elsewhere the domain of the tall, silent trees extends almost unbroken as it has always done, the natural haunt of the legion of mysterious brooding spirits of local legend and the deities of the distant north. The Odenwald —

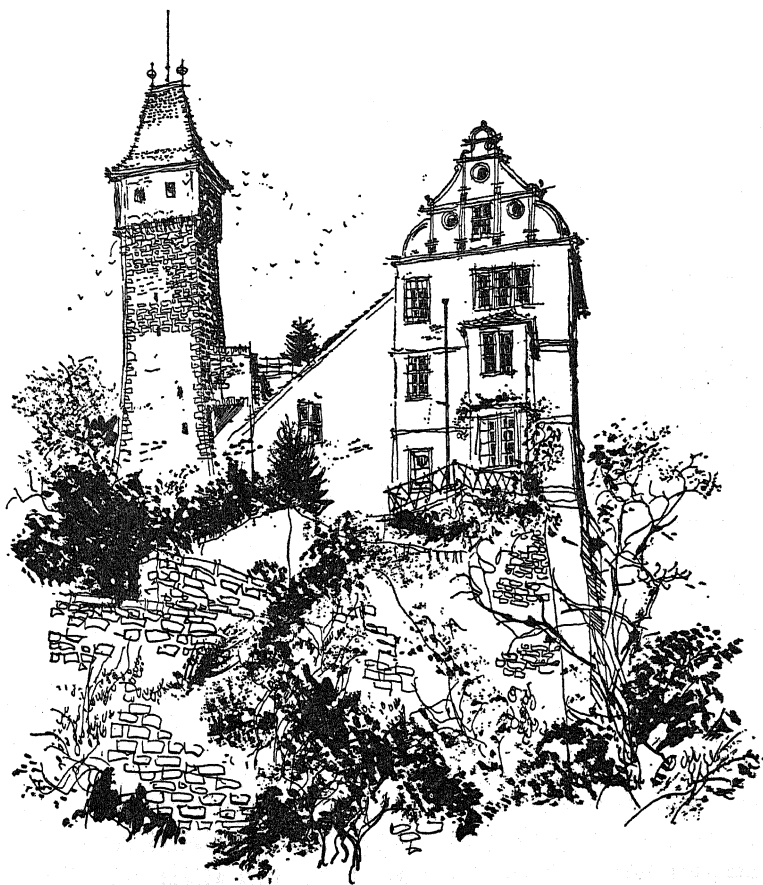
Odin's forest — is only a part of this primeval woodland, but it is certainly one of the loveliest. Ominous, yet not unfriendly, formidable but inviting, it beckoned us to hurry down to the Neckar again, row back across the river, leave the *Commodore* under the watchful eyes of the four castles on the Riegelsberg and set off to explore on foot one infinitesimal part of its vast expanse.

The Odenwald is curiously silent. Noises there certainly are, for the tits creak and rasp in the tops of the giant pines, a spotted woodpecker may be drumming on a dead stem in the distance, and perhaps the faint mew of a buzzard filters down from the clear sky where a pair are wheeling high above a clearing, ready to drop upon any small animal so incautious as to show its presence by the slightest movement. But to the person accustomed to English woodlands the most striking aspect of this background of sound is its lack of tunefulness and gaiety, the absence of the cheerful notes of the summer warblers and the robust and confident trills of songbirds which give to the mixed woods of Britain their warm and happy character. Only hurried squeaks and clicks come from the thickets of the Odenwald, and yet it is certainly alive with creatures. Spiders spin their strong scaffolding from tree to tree at just the correct height to lie across the face of a walker. A rustle in the leaves shows where a lizard is darting for cover from the few square inches of sunshine which have somehow managed to filter through the trees. A slower, more drawn-out movement in the carpet of beech leaves may reveal a blackish grey snake a yard in length, a handsome fellow with brilliant greenish-blue eyes, the *Ringelnatter*. Bright orange slugs move noiselessly across the way on their lubricated paths, and in the distance a snapping of sticks and swift pounding of feet betrays a deer, or perhaps a wild boar. On our walk across the hills we did not see any boars, though there must have been plenty in the forest; but we encountered three snakes, which regarded us with placid, unemotional stares.

The path we had chosen eventually led us out from the cool forest into a side valley bathed in sunshine, and opposite us across the meadows in its bottom there stood a fairy-tale castle, with a handsome Renaissance residence and a series of towers and bastions of much older walls running right down the spine of the

hill to a village which, like Neckarsteinach, seemed to have had some difficulty in squeezing itself into the narrow strip of comparatively flat land between hillside and river. On the side facing out to the Neckar, Hirschhorn is guarded from floods as well as from enemies by a town wall on which several of the smaller houses are perched to overhang at either side, whilst their larger neighbours peep over the defences from within to make sure that all is well.

Hirschhorn is probably the most picturesque of all the small towns and villages which straggle along the banks of the Neckar. Although its castle is still occupied, the family of Hirschhorn



itself became extinct in the seventeenth century, when Friedrich von und zu Hirschhorn died without leaving an heir. In 1770, when work was being carried out on the walls of the castle of Handschuhsheim, there came to light a cavity in which were found the remains of a knight in richly decorated armour bearing the marks of sword blows, and though his identity has never been established there is no doubt at all that he had been walled up alive. Sixty years after this discovery, workmen repairing the castle of Hirschhorn came upon a lady's shoe, and excavating the wall they discovered the standing skeleton of a young woman who had been similarly buried alive within the masonry. The two finds confirmed a strong local tradition that a member of each family had been punished in this barbarous way for an illicit union, and that a Carmelite friar had once told a local hermit that he was sworn to secrecy as to details, but that the hermit, who had been a foundling boy, would find the bones of his mother within the castle of Hirschhorn.

Leonard, the foundling, had in fact been brought up by the Carmelites, who had taught him to read and write and also trained him as a joiner, and connecting his own existence with the tradition of the pair of lovers walled up in the two castles (and whose remains had not then come to light) he repeatedly wandered both to Hirschhorn and to Handschuhsheim, begging permission to carve memorials to his mother and his father. His entreaties were not well received — perhaps because to have granted his wish would have been an admission that there was more than mere legend in the tale of the victims — and both Friedrich von Hirschhorn and his relative Johann von Handschuhsheim turned the man away from their gates.

Of Leonard the hermit little more is known, except that he is said to have built the six coffins for the band of musicians who were drowned with the ferryman when crossing the river by night after playing at Friedrich von Hirschhorn's wedding feast up at the castle. It may of course have been the Hakenmann who was responsible for the disaster, but more probably the ferryman had drunk too freely at the party. So perhaps had the minstrels. But whatever the cause, as they crossed the swift passage below the

village, playing on their instruments, in the light of the moon, their boat was upset and all were drowned.

This tragedy might well have marked the wedding as ill-starred. And so it proved. Both the Hirschhorns and the Handschuhsheims had already been in danger of dying out for lack of heirs, and it is possible that the walling up of the lovers had been intended in some way to put matters right, for such a practice was often regarded as favourable to the birth of boys. But however that may be, Friedrich von Hirschhorn, who was to be the last but certainly the greatest member of his family, had tragedy enough hanging over his head. When he was hardly twenty years old he attended a party at Heidelberg with his uncle the lord of Handschuhsheim, who was about the same age as himself. On this occasion the Elector Friedrich V presented von Handschuhsheim with an ornamental dagger, and for some reason Hirschhorn coveted this gift — and perhaps the special esteem which it implied. The two men became involved in a quarrel, and that same night they drew swords on each other in the market-place of Heidelberg. Handschuhsheim, the only heir of his line, was slightly wounded, but the cut became gangrenous and three weeks later he died of blood-poisoning. His mother, Hirschhorn's own grandmother, called upon his attacker and cursed his house that he, too, might die without an heir.

Judged by his fellow nobles, Hirschhorn was ordered to expiate his deed with a considerable sum of money to support needy students at Heidelberg, and this he willingly did. In fact, he was so overcome by remorse that he devoted much of his life to charitable works. He was a model landlord for his days, and apart from his own manors and his properties in Bruchsal and Heilbronn he owned more than one hundred villages in the Neckar valley. These he managed with such wise political skill that not one of them was destroyed in the wars of religion which raged through the land — for this was the time of the Thirty Years War. Yet the guilt for his uncle's death could never leave him, and it was in vain that he married twice and had a considerable number of children with each wife. Every one of his sons fell a victim either to Tilly's Spanish cavalry, or to sickness. The last of his boys died in infancy in 1632.

With resignation Friedrich von Hirschhorn retired to his seat at Heilbronn, drew up a will in which he disposed of his possessions to the benefit of his many subjects, and within a few weeks died.

When, on the day following our walk across the corner of the forest, we headed up the river and drew in sight of the little town of Hirschhorn again, we found a dozen or more ships lying at anchor below the lock at the head of the village. This was because the second lock-chamber was still under construction — the great increase in traffic since the opening of the Port of Stuttgart in 1958 having made it necessary to double the locks all the way up the river. Had the *Commodore* been a barge she might have had to wait all day in the queue, but we knew that we could count on there being space enough for her to squeeze herself into the back right-hand corner of any lock on the river. The pens were some 360 feet long, but with a breadth of 40 feet they were not quite broad enough to take two heavy barges side by side, and so the ships were fitted into the lock on the familiar German system of slanting them crosswise so that the stern of one vessel would be overlapped several feet by the taper of the bow of the one behind. By this means it was usually possible to take four laden barges instead of three, and it also meant that at the rear of the sardining arrangement a wedge-shaped space was left into which the *Commodore* could nearly always be fitted.

Travelling through the locks with the commercial craft had another advantage, too. The *Commodore* then counted as a *Mitschleuser* or with-locker, and as such she only paid the sum of 45 pfennigs. Travelling alone as an *Alleinschleuser* she would be charged four times as much, and if by any chance she were to give notice that she wished to pass through after hours this fee would be increased by a further fifty per cent, but with the locks open from six in the morning until eight at night the chances of her desiring to be an expensive and pushful *Spätschleuser* were remote. The only time she came near to paying the top rate was on a Sunday afternoon, below Stuttgart. On Sundays the locks were closed at three o'clock, and with only one more lock ahead of her she was quite prepared to have an expensive lift. But the lock-keeper shook his head. There was no need to be extravagant, he said. A trip-

steamer was already in sight down the river, and it would be paying the late fee. If we waited the few minutes till it arrived, the *Commodore* would then qualify as a *Mitschleuser* and we would thus save 2 marks and 25 pfennigs. With this suggestion we readily complied and left the late fee to the steamer's bill.

The entire navigation of the Neckar is in the hands of the Neckar Company, a concern which derives income from its twenty power-stations built alongside the locks, as well as from the shipping. The company is almost entirely owned by the Federal Republic and the *Land* of Baden-Württemberg, with less than two per cent of the shares owned by the *Land* of Hessen and various municipal corporations. Under its constitution it was obliged to construct and maintain the Neckar waterway and hand it over as a going concern to the Federal Waterways Authority, but in return it was to be allowed to recoup the expenses by operating the power-stations for one hundred years after the completion of through navigation to Heilbronn, which was achieved in 1935. At present the water is a Class IV navigation (for ships of 1350 tons) as far as Stuttgart, and from there to Plochingen, ten miles further upstream, it is a Class I navigation (300 tons, if there happens to be enough water). But it is not necessarily intended that the river should be a cul-de-sac, and plans exist for linking it with the Danube at Ulm by sixty miles of canal. With the alternative link by way of the Main already under construction it seems unlikely that the Neckar-Danube Canal will ever in fact be built — particularly as it would need to rise to a height of more than 1800 feet, 500 feet higher than the watershed to be crossed by the Main-Danube Canal. Yet interest in the scheme is strong in Swabia, and it has even been suggested that some of the climb might be avoided by a long tunnel under the hills of the Schwäbische Alb. Besides, Germany is by no means narrow boat-minded. Its waterways are gigantic undertakings, and if any proposition for a canal is economically sound it will eventually be put in hand. Not everyone would have thought that the works carried out on the Neckar were worth while, and yet today the inland ports of Heilbronn and Stuttgart, more than 450 miles from the sea, are among the most flourishing trans-shipment centres in Western Europe.

## IV

*The cuckoos of Eberbach — Zwingenberg — the heronry —  
the dog of Minneburg — the Duck-slayer of Mudau — the  
physician of Mosbach — Notburga and the deer — the  
castle of Götz von Berlichingen*

Above Hirschhorn, the *Commodore* turned a sharp loop of the river and changed her course from northward to southward. Another swing in the line of the Neckar brought her back towards the north-east, and soon she was running up towards the town of Eberbach (or Boar-Brook), with its towers and turrets and parts of its former circuit of walls still flanking the river. The river bank and the narrow streets of the old part of the town were packed with stalls selling sticky toffee, nuts and nougat, bratwurst, beer, pottery gnomes, check shirts, trousers and shoes, printed fabrics, and all the other curious goods which the countryman likes occasionally to have offered to him. The yearly *Kuckucksmarkt* was in full swing, and in the market place we even found a fountain running with wine.

That the people of Eberbach are known to those of other Odenwald towns as 'cuckoos' is the result of a law-suit which took place in the year 1604. The landlord of an inn in the hamlet of Neckarwimmerbach charged a certain cooper of Eberbach with having alleged that when he dined at the inn at Whitsun he had in fact been served not with roast chicken but with a cuckoo. This the defendant did not for one moment deny. On the contrary, he produced witnesses to prove that what he had alleged was indeed true.

The incident was traced back to the peculiar sense of humour of a local doctor who, having caught a cuckoo, plucked it and took it to the inn where it was duly roasted and served up, half to himself and half to the cooper who was sitting at the same table. The



doctor feigned loss of appetite and pushed his share across to the cooper, who thus came to eat the whole bird for his dinner. When the man had finished his hearty meal the doctor revealed his little joke, and the cooper became an object of great merriment to the rest of the company. The story was naturally passed from village to village that the Eberbachers, for all their commercial wisdom and worldliness, were so stupid that one could serve them cuckoo and they would think it chicken. But if long ago the people of Eberbach were rather sensitive about their nickname, they are now sufficiently far removed from the actual event to adopt it with a certain amount of pride in the name of their annual fair and market.

The waterfront of Eberbach is perhaps the most beautiful of any along the Neckar. Across the road from the long stone quay at which lie some of the local ships, the houses face out confidently towards the water, their window-boxes gay with trailing geraniums, lobelias and marigolds. The Powder Tower and the Rose Tower, the Blue Hat and the Reel Tower peep up from among them as though to have a better view of what is going on outside, and behind the town the Odenwald woods rise richer and more beautiful than ever, a mixed forest of timber trees, pine and oak, beech and larch and Douglas fir according to the direction and steepness of the slope. The general effect is one of a genial and prosperous community which has somehow managed to survive the tribulations of its repeated invasions by Swedes and Saxons, Bavarians, French and Prussians, and has carried on stolidly with its business of shipping, forestry, and hunting. Around the town itself are some flourishing modern industries, but cuckoo-clocks are not among the local products.

Above the bridge, the river speedily leaves the houses behind and leads up to the most glorious stretches of its entire course, the long reaches above and below the lock of Rockenau. Here the forest falls right to the water, and perched upon a bluff on the southern side is yet another castle ruin, that of the Stolzeneck. This, too, was a den of robber lords who swooped down upon the wagons and ships of the traders as they passed through the valley, but fortunately the *Commodore* had nothing to fear from them as they had long been extinct — even if their ill-gotten riches were,

as some said, still hidden beneath the castle where they were watched over by a ferocious spirit in the form of a dog, which had the key to the vaults in its mouth.

Round the sweeping bend of the river beyond the castle two of the most unexpected sights of the Neckar valley come into view. On the left, there stands half-way up the hillside another castle which, instead of being a ruin with a restaurant, is completely restored, not as a den of highwaymen but to form the hunting castle of the Margrave of Baden. And this castle, with its hatted towers and battlements frowning down across the tree-tops has a connection with Britain, for it is there that the Duke of Edinburgh may sometimes take a holiday from state occasions when he visits his brother-in-law the Margrave.

The hamlet below the castle is curiously feudal in appearance, and the space left for houses between the almost vertical hillside and the Neckar is so restricted that there is room for them on one side of the street only. Originally there was nothing but the fortress castle itself, and the villagers first arrived when a long overdue fate befell the robber-nest of Stolzeneck, which had become such a terror in the land that the Electors of the Palatinate at length decided to destroy it. The hamlet of Krösselbach which sheltered under its protection was also razed, and the unfortunate inhabitants of this village, who had hardly enjoyed an easy life under the Stolzeneck lords, were obliged to flee across the river and settle themselves at the water's edge under the surveillance of the lords of Zwingenberg.

Like Neckarsteinach, Zwingenberg also had its period as a den of noble thieves, and in its day it was the terror of the middle reaches of the Neckar. Here, too, there was a chain to obstruct the shipping, and no vessel could pass up or down the forest river without being obliged to halt and submit itself to a search. Such of the cargo as might be useful to the robber lords was seized, or else the shipmaster was obliged to pay 'dues' for release, and if by any chance rich merchants were so unwise as to accompany their goods aboard a ship they were imprisoned until a suitable ransom was forthcoming. If the money was not paid, then the unfortunate traders never reached the end of their voyage. This was more than

the Emperor Charles IV would tolerate, and mounting an adequate force he attacked the castle, destroyed it completely and drove the noble highwaymen into the forest.

Zwingenberg was later rebuilt, and in the early years of the nineteenth century it passed finally into the hands of the Margraves of Baden, who made a brave attempt to found new villages in the neighbourhood in order to attract settlers to work in the forests. Unfortunately this enlightened policy failed, for the settlements were too remote and isolated and their inhabitants found it very much more profitable to work as thieves and poachers than as woodsmen and lumberers. They roamed the forest, holding up any who came their way, and so dangerous did the passage of the Odenwald become that the State of Baden was forced to take action. The settlers and their families were rounded up, marched to Zwingenberg, loaded aboard rafts in the river and floated all the way to Rotterdam, where they were transhipped to a sea-going vessel and sent off to swell the rapidly increasing population of America.

The Zwingenbergers did not share the fate of the rest, and their village remains very much as it must always have been. For sheer lack of space it has never expanded, and even the summer campers are obliged to pitch their tents in a meadow across the river where they are also more removed from the roar of the traffic, which almost brushes the sides of the houses as it tears past the village on a roadway built out into the edge of the stream. And there they can enjoy a perfect view of the Margravia castle, or examine the detail of the chain-ship on the ferryman's cottage, and if they are ornithologists they can walk a little further along their shore and watch the sixty or more pairs of herons feeding their youngsters in the only heronry on the Neckar.

This heronry has long been in the neighbourhood, though originally it was rather further upstream, beyond the site of Guttenbach lock. Some boys once climbed a tree and robbed one of the nests of its youngsters, a piece of vandalism which caused a great commotion among the birds. It seems that the parent herons held some kind of conference in the meadow on that same evening, and there was much snapping of bills and shaking of heads. The

decisions were not made public, but that year the herons flew off unusually early, and in the following spring they returned to build their nests further downstream, at the present site.

The herons have had to adapt themselves to the results of the enterprise of the Neckar Company. Before its canalization in the 1930s, the river flowed swift and shallow, edged with marshes and reeds, and it was indeed just such an ideal stream as herons might wish for. They could stand on their stilted legs in the shallows and dart a swift beak to snap up any fish which ventured near enough, and they might gobble up the frogs which hopped among the marshy tufts of rushes. But the Rockenau barrage raised the level of the water to a depth too great even for their long shanks, and the clearance of the banks destroyed the froggy paradise at the edge. The herons had to face the fact that in future they would be obliged to look elsewhere for their food.

One might expect that the birds would simply have packed up and left, shaking their graceful crested heads in sorrow at what the navigation authorities were doing. Yet they were reluctant to go, evidently preferring to keep their village of nests where it was, or perhaps to remain within sight of the handsome castle opposite. Or it may have been that they realized that it would not be easy to find an alternative site where the trees were as suitable for nesting as those of the Odenwald, and where the water conditions were any better. Ingeniously they turned more and more to beetles and other creatures of the land as food for their young, supplementing these as far as they could with an occasional frog or even a water-rat, and small fish from the brooks which flowed down the forest gulleys to join the main stream. And after all, there was the extra consideration that these brooks contained trout. In this way the herons conducted their housekeeping throughout the months of April and May, and when eventually the young were able to fly they would soar up and head for the reaches of the Rhine between Mannheim and Karlsruhe, where a number of disused loops and backwaters provided them with an excellent hunting ground.

And they have continued so to plan their economy. Opposite Zwingenberg the trees are white with their excrement and the floor of the forest is strewn with the bones of regurgitated

prey, but on a summer's day only a few of the birds can be seen squatting bulkily on the tops of the trees. Most are far away, down at their Rhineland feeding-grounds, and in the evening one may see them flying in small groups, high above the woods, as they return to their Neckar homestead. They do not follow the windings of the river itself but strike a direct rhumb line, or maybe even a Great Circle course, from their distant day-time marshes to Zwingenberg.

That the herons have a habit of swallowing their prey whole and later regurgitating the skeleton from which the flesh has been digested is a fact apparently known to the kestrels, for often these birds will chase a heron in its flight, not attacking it but inducing such nervous indigestion that the bird will lighten itself by vomiting up its newly swallowed prey. And long ago it was the custom in Germany as elsewhere to hunt herons with falcons, not usually in order to kill them but merely to bring them down so that the hunter might pluck out the graceful feathers of the crest to decorate the hat of his lady. On these hunting expeditions the herons were sometimes ringed before being set free, and from the fact that the same birds were occasionally brought down several times it was discovered that they could live for as long as fifty years.

The grey heron is protected in Germany, so the inhabitants of the Zwingenberg colony can fly to and fro throughout the summer unmolested. And it seems that they also stand under the personal guardianship of another curious spirit of the Neckar, for when on one occasion the Neckar froze over, and the ground along the bank was too hard for their sharp bills to stab in search of worms and grubs, they were threatened with starvation. It was then that there rose through the ice, it is said, the powerful figure of a water-spirit, a relative perhaps of those in the Mummelsee. Standing up to his waist in the freezing water he would repeatedly duck down below the ice, to emerge again with his hands full of fish, which he obligingly tossed to the herons assembled on the bank. Only when the severe cold was over and the ice began to break up did he finally sink back into the water and disappear, never to be seen again. Such a happening, it must be admitted is not recorded in the standard ornithological works, nor even in Brehm's *Tierleben*, but

perhaps these authors had never pursued their researches at Zwingenberg.

Up on the hillside behind the home of the herons is another castle, not restored and modernized like Zwingenberg, but ruined and forlorn. It is perhaps the most romantic of all the former homes of the lords of the valley, and its story haunts the memory of the people of the Odenwald. The tale, like so many from the middle ages, concerns a proud and unbending father who wished to marry off his only and beautiful daughter against her will, and tells of her flight from home before she could be dragged to the wedding feast. No doubt such a domestic quarrel was not uncommon in times when a father's wishes were paramount but when his daughters were brought up in an atmosphere of chivalry. It was not of forced marriages but of devotion and *Minne* that the troubadours or *Minnesinger* — one of the most notable of whom was a Blinger of Neckarsteinach, whose great epic has unfortunately been lost — sang to the company gathered round the fire in the great hall of every castle up and down the land, and if young girls sometimes resisted being married for financial or diplomatic reasons to men they did not love, the ballad singers may well have helped to steel them to oppose the father's will.

The Minneburg had many owners, and at one time it was held by the robber branch of the Landschadens of Neckarsteinach, who were thus able to rob the same ships twice in the course of a single voyage. Even today the walls, which are in some places three metres thick, would provide quite a formidable defence, and attackers in past ages ran the extra hazard of boiling water, quicklime and other unpleasant materials poured over them from strategically placed spouts. Over the door of the residential quarters is carved a dog, in memory of the faithful creature which played a part in the events which led to the foundation of the castle itself.

Almost one thousand years have passed since Minna von Horneck lived under the strict surveillance of her father in Castle Horneck, close to the modern site of Gundelsheim lock. She fell in love with the young knight Edelmüt, but because he was poor her father would hear nothing of a possible marriage. Like most lordly

fathers of his day he was more concerned to consolidate his land and possessions, and for this reason he had selected as a suitable match for his daughter the wealthy von Schwarzenberg, who lived near Worms. But Minna and Edelmute promised each other that they could never love any other, and they lived in the hope that something would happen to change the plans of the lord of Horneck.

And then came the envoys of the redbear'd Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, calling upon all men of valour to join a crusade to free the Holy Land from the infidel, and Edelmute joined the company of knights from the Neckar valley which was to set out for the Middle East. He swore his eternal love to Minna and, upon leaving, presented her with his dog.

Seven years passed and no news of Edelmute reached Minna as she waited disconsolate in her father's castle. And now her father, who was old and sick, declared that the time had come when she should be provided for, and he announced that the marriage to von Schwarzenberg would take place without delay. In despair, Minna decided to flee, and taking her most trusted servant into her confidence she slipped quietly out of the castle by night, using the underground passage which led down to the river and which had been cut as an emergency exit in case the Horneck should be stormed. With her there went her trusted maidservant, and her dog.

Arrived at the Neckar, the fugitives boarded a boat, cast it loose, and thrust out into the stream. When dawn began to break they had already drifted many miles down river, and climbing ashore they pushed the boat out again so that it would float on its way and not betray their whereabouts. Up in the forest they at length came upon a cave at the foot of a rocky cliff, and there they hid themselves. For food they had the berries and fruits and perhaps the fungi of the forest, for the Odenwald is rich in these natural supplies, and from time to time Minna would take the dog and set out on a walk through the woods to gather food. She also carved the arms of Edelmute in the bark of the trees over a wide area around her secret hiding-place.

At last Edelmute returned from his warfare against the Turks.

Arriving at Horneck he at once heard that Minna had vanished, but the fact that the dog and servant had also disappeared convinced him that somewhere or other they must be hiding together. With his men he began to search the woods, and eventually one of them came upon the arms of Edelmüt's family cut upon a forest tree near Neckargerach. They had not searched much further before the dog, old but presumably well nourished from the abundance of game in the Odenwald, burst out of a thicket and gave the knight an affectionate welcome.

The dog then set out to show the way, and he led Edelmüt to the cave. According to one version of the tale the faithful Minna had long since died of cold and exposure and had been buried by her maidservant, so that it was only her grave beneath the bushes that Edelmüt found. But more appropriate to the age of chivalry is the ending which tells that it was the maid who had died, and Minna herself was lying sick and weak on the damp moss in the rocky cleft. The arrival of her love restored her for a moment to her former radiant self but she was too weak to move, and lying in Edelmüt's arms she whispered to him once more of her devotion, and died. The Minneburg or Love Castle was built by Edelmüt on the site of her hiding place as a memorial to their mutual love. And as for the faithful dog, he was incorporated in the family arms, and carved in stone by a later lord of the Minneburg.

The herons were already awake and discussing the idea of a day's excursion to the Rhine when we passed below the crumbling walls of the Minneburg soon after dawn — for they seemed to find, as we did ourselves, that to lie long in bed in such beautiful surroundings was impossible. In the first light of a new day the Neckar was at its most beautiful, and we would always be up and about, enjoying to the full the enchanting quiet of the morning stillness. Often the surface of the river would lie hidden beneath several inches of white mist, from which there protruded the periscope heads of the ducks as they swam busily about their morning affairs. On the banks the reeds shone in their glistening coat of dew, and the water forget-me-nots bowed their heads ever so slightly under the weight of the droplets. Already the hawks of the forest would be wheeling in broad orbit high above the Odenwald — not



it seemed, for any other purpose than to enjoy the view of the expanse of dark green hills beneath them. Then the early sun would climb behind the forest to transfigure the trees and burst upon the water through a dip in the skyline of the hills, quickly spiriting away the shreds of mist and inviting us to bathe in the warm water, with detergent provided free of charge. Soon after, the first of the barges would be heard thumping its way round the bend below us, the heavy hurrying motor telling us that before long the lock-keepers would be opening the control cabin and sitting back to begin the day's work of pressing a knob here, watching a gauge there, and holding themselves ready to spend a pleasant few minutes in conversation with their customers. And as the barges began to move, so we would follow them, moving in to occupy our back corner as a *Mitschleuser* as soon as the last of the freighters had properly made fast. Until then we would hover discreetly twenty yards astern, for if the skipper put his rudder hard over and gave a sharp burst of his hundreds of horsepower to bring the stern of his ship against the opposite wall, the *Commodore* would be driven against the side along with the swirling water. Only if the ship was a *Schleppkahn*, a giant lighter from Rotterdam or the Ruhr, would we tail her in at a distance of merely a few feet, for we knew that having no motor she would not be subject to such convulsions.

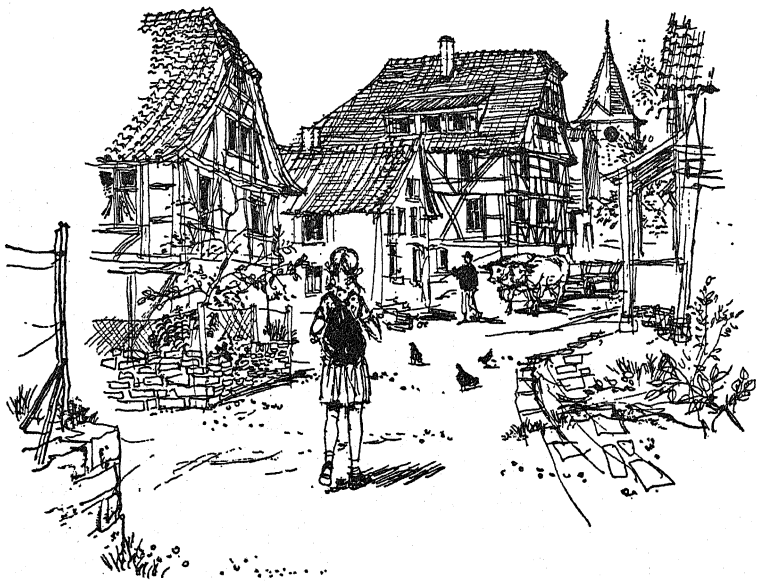
The ships moved so slowly in and out of the locks that the whole procedure might take nearly an hour, and when we came up to the next village it would already be time to go ashore for the fresh milk and steamy rolls for breakfast. This meal we took in continental style except that we often added a cereal, marvelling at the ease with which snap, crackle and pop became *knisper*, *knasper* and *knusper*, just as on our Swedish journeys it had been rendered as *piff*, *paff* och *puff*.

Later in the morning we would probably climb up to one of the ruined nests of the robbers, or set out to explore the Odenwald with the pleasant prospect of a lunch of beer and bratwurst, coffee and creamy cakes at a hamlet set in an upland clearing. On our return towards evening we would be carrying the dessert for supper — a pound or two of juicy wild raspberries, fat ripe bil-

berries fresh in their downy blue coat of bloom, or the rich red strawberries which could almost invariably be found wherever the lumbermen had cleared a plantation a year or two before. These delicious fruits, together with the yellow-brown inside-out umbrellas of the *Cantharella* fungus or the curious bright orange fingers of the *Rotbart* which grew on the rotting roots of felled pines were offered to us by Odin out of his liberality, and we did not hesitate to accept his gifts.

On one of these walks we tried to trace part of the line of the *Limes*, the wall which had separated the Roman Reich from the barbarians to the east. It was not in fact the main line of the *Limes* itself that we were endeavouring to follow, but the earlier Mümling Line, a sort of Siegfried Line built by Vespasian and Trajan between the years A.D. 69 and 117 to run from the Neckar at Wimpfen northwards to the River Main. Within the following twenty years the larger and more strongly fortified *Limes* itself was built twelve miles further east, and of this we were later to see traces when the *Commodore* took us to the further side of the Odenwald, up the Franconian river itself.

Reaching the line of the wall at Neckarburken we found the



remains of two of the smaller forts, the carefully hewn pillars of their gateways lying among the long grass, partly overgrown with poppies and mallow. Roaming further afield, we noticed on our map the black trace of a railway line somewhere among the hills, and so we decided to make for one of the villages which was marked as having a station. It was thus that we made the acquaintance of the *Entenmörder* or Duck-slayer.

The shed which represented the station was seemingly deserted, but when we knocked on the window of the booking-office the clerk rose from the floor under the table and putting his paws on the counter peered through the glass at us enquiringly. He was an enormous Alsatian, glossy black on his back, and we asked him politely for four second-class tickets to Mosbach. In reply he bared his teeth a little, but made no attempt to issue the tickets. The train, it seemed, was not due for another twenty minutes, and there was no hurry. Why should there be? And what, for that matter, did it concern him if the train from Mudau to Mosbach was five minutes, half an hour, an hour late? Of a train which could take more than two hours to accomplish a run of just over fifteen miles, all of it downhill, anything might be expected.

But the train was not late. For several minutes before its arrival round a sharp corner beyond the station we could hear a tolling of a funeral bell as the *Entenmörder* warned the ducks to flee for their lives, and just occasionally a brisk fluty hoot was intended, no doubt, to frighten a stag or a wild boar from the track. At last the train drew into the station, the engine panting with exhaustion and perspiring at every joint of its ancient frame. Its tall, cone-shaped funnel seemed several sizes too big for it, and we wondered whether perhaps the draughtsman had made some error of scale in preparing the detailed drawings for this particular item, but perhaps it was designed so large in order that sparks starting at the bottom would be dead long before they reached the top, and there would thus be no risk of forest fires such as might cause Odin to summon Thor to fling his hammer at the poor little engine.

The engine proudly proclaimed in polished lettering on the brass birth certificate upon its side that it was a Borsig of 1904. And if it was facing backwards to haul its load of two balconied

coaches and a couple of real Bundesbahn wagons which were supported on trolleys so that their standard gauge wheels hung over the campanulas and marguerites to either side of the narrow track, we presumed that this must be because the management of the Mosbach-Mudau expresses did not rise to having a turntable at the end of the track.

Before the Borsig steamed in, a woman arrived from the village to take over from the Alsatian in the booking office, and with our tickets paid for we climbed up to the foremost balcony, so close to the locomotive that we could lean across and pat its gleaming black boiler whilst the smoke was shot high over our heads by the funnel. Soon we were off, racing along at ten miles an hour across the meadows to dive into the forest again and follow the bed of a trout stream of the hills. Once or twice we dared to cross a road, but there were neither barriers nor lights at the crossing, the Duck-slayer of Mudau relying entirely upon the clang of its bell and the whoop of its whistle to frighten away any such monsters as carts or cows or postbuses which might be approaching at right angles. Now and again we would burst from the dark of the trees to cross another sloping meadow richly dotted with the delicate mauve of autumn crocus, or to skirt the yard of a small-holding and exchange compliments with the geese, which were prudent enough to stand to one side before stretching out their necks to hiss at the poor little engine in the hope of frightening it off the rails. At last Mosbach drew in sight and we slowed to a more sedate pace before making a stately entry into the main street, tolling the funeral bell as a tactful hint to motorists. Our journey ended as the train puffed to a halt at the station — not at the platform but outside in the street among the pedestrians and the waiting buses, for the super-snooty streamlined triple-expansion multi-valved brass-bound engines of the Bundesbahn were so conceited on account of their being allowed to haul real long-distance corridor trains with dining-cars (*Schnellzugzuschlagschein* obligatory) and lavatories and vacuum brakes, and glass cases containing axes with which to hack a path to freedom through the primeval forest if the coaches should derail, that they refused to allow the little Borsig to approach their sacred tracks at all. Not that the Borsig minded, for it led a freer

life, unhedged by official prohibitions. It was a case of *nicht hinauslehnen* on the main line, but aboard the Duck-slayer one might lean out as much as one wished, and with a quick eye and a long arm the traveller could help himself to ripe cherries or raspberries from the bushes which overhung the cuttings.

Mosbach, the terminus of the Mudau line, is strikingly different from its neighbours among the Neckar towns, not merely because



it does not actually stand on the river but also in its appearance of being a Franconian town which has somehow become displaced from its proper native land a bare twenty or thirty miles further north in the territory of the River Main. In fact, the splendid timbered houses of its market-place form one of the finest groups to be seen in the Neckar area, and they are for the most part built in the complex Franconian style of timbering with the successive stories leaping out boldly, each one further than the one below. And no doubt this reflects the prosperity of the merchants of the Mosbach of three and four centuries ago, men who travelled to Frankfurt and to Würzburg, buying and selling their merchandise but also acquiring new ideas, fresh tastes, and the money with which to pay for them.

Besides the beauty of their style, the timbered houses of Mosbach have an added attractiveness on account of the colouring of the beams and stays. Sometimes these are of pale ochre, but often a dull red not unlike the mellower Falun red of the boarded buildings of Sweden. The pigment used is not a copper product, but it certainly contains a trace of iron, for it is ancient and denatured haemoglobin. The joiners of the period had the habit of steeping the timbers in ox blood to preserve them, and in the course of time this has faded to a gentle hue which is particularly pleasant.

Quite apart from the central group around the market-place and the town hall, Mosbach has many fine buildings from its greatest period in the Renaissance, and some from later times — among them the charming little house which boasts a Nepomuk standing in sad contemplation beside the first-floor windows. And if he looks particularly sad, it is perhaps not just that he has been deprived of any bridge over which to watch, but because he was put there by the man who built the house in 1710, and who held the combined posts of practising physician and town executioner. One might imagine that these two occupations operated in rather opposed directions, but a study of any plates showing a doctor of that period treating his patients is enough to realise that the two professions were not altogether dissimilar. A doctor needed cool nerves and an ability to disregard the shrieks of his patients if he was to be able to carry out some of the operations depicted —

removing the spleen, opening up the bladder or merely hacking off a gangrenous leg or arm with a carpenter's saw. And similarly, a conscientious executioner, who not only had to behead men with a sword but perhaps gouge out eyes, chop off the hands of parricides, or disembowel his victim alive on a table in public view, could perform his work more effectively if he had an experienced and practical knowledge of anatomy. If the executioner of Mosbach came to decorate his house with the sorrowful saint of the Vltava bridge it may well have been out of pity for those whom he assisted towards a sudden and unpleasant end when he would rather have dealt with their physical infirmities.

Although Mosbach lies away from the Neckar in the valley of the Elz, it is less than three miles from the lock of Neckarzimmern, upstream of which towers the castle of Hornberg, standing proudly at the top of its own terraced vineyards — the vines being a sure sign that the red sandstone of the lower reaches has suddenly given way to limestone, and that the Odenwald is about to reach its limits. In another castle on the site of the Hornberg there lived in the early days of Frankish history the Merovingian King, Dagobert I, and the strange legend of his daughter Notburga is centred on that vanished stronghold and on the Notburga Cave, still to be seen in times of drought on the opposite bank of the river, a short way below the lock and weir — for the raising of the water level by the Neckar Company has put its entrance below the normal height of the river, and when we passed it the cavity was invisible. The story is told in frescoes in the little church of the hamlet of Hochhausen a mile further downstream, and in the same church is the tomb of Notburga herself, with a memorial showing her with only one arm.

Notburga's story is yet another of a daughter revolting against a marriage forced upon her by her father, and of her flight from home on the eve of the wedding, but it has not the customary ending. She is said to have brought up and tended as a pet an albino deer, and when she stood in fearful indecision as to how she might escape the fate of unwanted matrimony the faithful creature mutely invited her to leap upon its back and hold tightly to its antlers. This she did, and the deer bounded away down the hill-

side, swam across the Neckar, and vanished with its rider in the trees on the further shore.

Every day the noble animal returned to the Hornberg and visited the kitchens for its customary loaf of bread, but instead of taking the food in its mouth it bent down to invite Notburga's servant to impale the bread on its tines. Then it would speed away again, swim the river, and bearing the provisions high and dry on its head it would return to its beloved mistress in the cave where she was hiding.

Dagobert had meanwhile searched the neighbourhood without success, but at last he noticed the behaviour of the deer, and when it next appeared at the castle he leaped into his saddle and gave chase, following it across the stream to where it disappeared into the cave. Dismounting, he strode inside to find Notburga kneeling in prayer before a primitive altar, and the deer lying beside her. Peremptorily he ordered his daughter to return home with him at once, but she refused. She had renounced the world, she declared, and had now dedicated her life elsewhere. Dagobert sought for a while to reason with her, but as she still remained unmoved he seized her by the arm and attempted to drag her out of the cave. Notburga clung desperately to the cross, and when her father pulled with all his might there happened something which must indeed have surprised him, for her arm came away in his hand. It is understandable enough that he is said to have fled from the cave in terror and to have left the Hornberg for ever.

As for Notburga, she not unnaturally fainted from loss of blood, but a snake — which is also depicted on her tomb — brought her a herb which caused the wound to heal. She lived the remainder of her life in the cave, occupied in works of healing and charity to the poor, and as a local missionary to the people around. Even today she is honoured locally as a saint.

Yet it is not with Notburga that the Hornberg or Götzenburg is generally connected, but with the rough and turbulent character of Götz von Berlichingen, who spent many years of honourable confinement within the walls of the castle which still stands as a romantic ruin, looking out defiantly over the sweep of the Neckar towards its tight loop below Gundelsheim. It was here that he



wrote the memoirs upon which Goethe drew when he wrote his *Götz von Berlichingen*, or *The Knight with the Iron Hand*. The bluff and doughty Götz was perhaps the most famous political character the Neckar valley was ever to know, and in the hands of Goethe he was to be shaped into an even more glamorous and heroic figure than in fact he was.

As the tenth child of his parents, Gottfried von Berlichingen could have no hope of a stake in the family estate at Jagsthausen, and the inheritance due to him was paid out in cash. Leaving home, he joined the forces of the Emperor Maximilian at the early age of seventeen, and when he was only twenty-four he lost his right hand in battle. The smith in his home village of Jagsthausen forged for him his famous hand of iron, which is still to be seen there in the family castle, and which was provided with such an ingenious mechanism that its owner was still able to ride and to fight. And the young Götz was certainly of a restive, warlike nature; although he himself was not actually a robber knight he aided one of the more notorious ones and he indulged in sufficient raiding and quarrelling of his own for the Emperor to be forced to outlaw him. In 1512 he was deprived of all his rights, and even his marriage was dissolved by the official declaration, which stated that his consort was now a widow, and his children orphans, his inheritance and property forfeited to his children, his body and flesh to the beasts of the forest and the birds of the air. Where every other man enjoyed peace and company on the highroad he would by right have none, and he was 'directed into the four corners of the world in the name of the devil'. For Götz this was a severe blow. He lost his property but within two years he managed to buy himself free of the proscription with a heavy sum. Yet for him to change his spots was impossible and he soon became involved in further quarrels, most of which stemmed from a curious sense of rough justice, and a hatred of the duplicity and intrigue which marked the dealings of so many of the aristocracy.

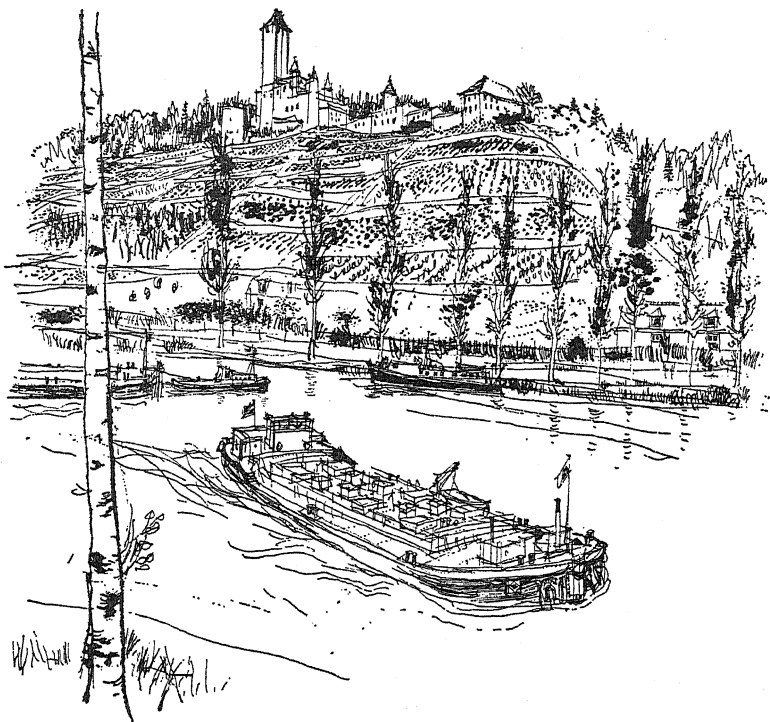
In 1517 Götz bought the castle of Hornberg on the Neckar, and he had not long been there when the Peasants' Revolt broke out. Rising against the bishops and landowners, the farmers and labourers advanced to the Neckar, burning and destroying and

torturing as they went, and when they had taken Gundelsheim a short way upstream of Götz's new seat at Hornberg the massed rebels realized that they could not hope to win the struggle unless they had an experienced and competent commander. They there and then decided that Götz should lead them, and advancing upon the Hornberg they announced their decision. At first their chosen general declined the honour, but as the only alternative was that he should be slaughtered in his own castle he gave in, and no doubt he was not altogether averse to assisting in the destruction of some of the enemies he detested.

After four bloody weeks, during which the relations between the thick-headed peasantry and their appointed leader were often extremely strained, the revolt was crushed. The landowners had won, and the end of feudal days was deferred for centuries. Götz was put on trial, and the statement made in his defence reads curiously like that made by many before the Denazification courts four centuries later. He had not wanted to help, but on the other hand he had not particularly wished to be disembowelled for refusing. In such a situation, what else could he have done? What could any man have done? And although he had joined the party, he had of course tried to temper its violence with wisdom, and if there had admittedly been atrocities might things not have been infinitely worse if he had not acted as he had, and exercised his restraining influence?

Götz lay for two years in prison, but he was sentenced to 'retirement' in his castle of Hornberg. He might not go out, nor was he to mount a horse. He continued, however, to quarrel, particularly with the town of Mosbach, but throughout ten frustrating years he served his sentence honourably enough to be pardoned by the Emperor, whom he later served in campaigns in France and against the Turks.

In the magnificent courtyard of the home of the von Berlichingens of Jagsthausen on the River Jagst the story of Götz and the Peasants' Revolt as romanticized by the youthful Goethe is performed on summer evenings by a first class company, and surely there can be no better place in which to see it acted out. Nor can one help admiring the tough, steel-fisted but burgherly



character of Götz himself as he tried in the face of every conceivable intrigue and treachery to better the lot of the oppressed country people of the Neckar and the Odenwald. Or amid the ruins of the castle above the Neckar one can sit on the terrace in the summer sunshine to drink a *Schoppen* of the clear wine from the terraced slope below, the same wine which once inspired the turbulent knight of the Hornberg to his martial deeds.

From the Hornberg we looked down beyond the vines and over the railway, the road and the river, towards the village of Hassmersheim lining the curve of the bend upstream. Hassmersheim is not a beauty-spot. It has a derelict railway bridge, and a dismantled factory — a deplorable blot on the landscape below the tall and melancholy castle of Götz. It lacks the charm of almost every other village of the Neckar, and yet it has been in many ways the most important. Without the shippers of Hassmersheim the Neckar might never have become such a flourishing waterway, and but for

its ships the river would probably have remained uncanalized, and thus impossible for the *Commodore* to visit. It was therefore somewhat ungrateful of her that she decided to pass it in the darkness of a summer midnight, picking out the shoal-spars in the beam of her searchlight and flashing her signal lamp in answer to that of a down-coming *Spätschleuser* to show that she clearly understood that she was to take the inside of the bend and meet him starboard to starboard, but noticing no more of the village than the yellow glows of the lamps hoisted on the outer side of the group of barges moored off the bank at their home port whilst the skippers enjoyed a brief day and night of family life in their homes ashore.

## V

*Hassmersheim — the first voyage from Rotterdam — riders of the river — Gundelsheim — the timber library — Wimpfen — Neckarsulm — cycles and sewing-machines — Laufen lock — Marbach and Ludwigsburg — the Commodore returns to the Rhine*

Of all the Neckar villages connected with shipping Hassmersheim has always been the most prominent, and its inhabitants include nearly one hundred ship-owners — quite apart from the skippers and pilots, the engineers and deck-hands, chandlers, shipwrights and tug-masters who live there. In fact the village lives almost entirely from shipping, and a slump in inland freightage hits the community harder than any other in Germany. Duisburg has more ships, but it has industries too, whereas Hassmersheim has for centuries staked its whole communal shirt on carrying by water.

The fortunes of the medieval Neckar boatmen rose and fell along with those of the shipmen of the Rhine, but with increasing traffic in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries severe competition for cargoes began. It was not long, however, before the guilds of bargemasters in the Neckar towns adopted the system of *Beurt*, the term being taken from the Dutch, who had for some time made a practice of running in turn, or in *Beurt*, between the Rhineland cities and Rotterdam. The principle was simple enough; rates were agreed, and the ships belonging to the *Beurt* took their turn for the next cargo, regardless of the payment (which might vary according to the type of goods) and the exact destination.

A *Beurt* for direct carriage between Heilbronn and Rotterdam was begun in 1840, and on July 5th of that year the first Neckar ship ever to reach Heilbronn with goods loaded in Rotterdam arrived in the port. Its owner-skipper was Friedrich Heuss, great-

grandfather of that genial and liberal man who became the first president of the Bundesrepublik. When Friedrich Heuss himself brought his vessel up the river using for power the combined efforts of horses and drovers and men with barge-poles, the occasion was one for great celebration among the merchants of that city, who came down the river to Wimpfen to escort him in triumph on the last lap of his voyage.

After this pioneer voyage the Heilbronn *Beurt* was immediately successful, and within a year seventy-five ships and more than 130 lighters brought coffee and oil, dried fish and cotton from the docks of Rotterdam, and thanks to the existence of steam towage on the Rhine the whole journey upstream could be made in only twenty-two days. As yet there was no steam on the Neckar, but it was shortly to come. The appearance on the Rhine of the first steamship — a British vessel — in the year after Waterloo stimulated the building of passenger steamers for other rivers, but the swift current and shallow bed of the Neckar raised considerable problems. Very similar conditions obtained on the Loire, where the engineer Gâche launched the first of his vessels confidently named *Les Inexplosibles*. This craft was so successful that he was at once commissioned to build further ships for the Moselle, an undertaking which roused the Heilbronn merchants to follow suit. By good fortune the parents of Gâche's patron, Count Ressequier, had fled to Heilbronn during the reign of terror and they had been so kindly treated by the local people that in gratitude the count now helped the Heilbronn merchants to acquire a Gâche vessel with a draught of only fourteen inches. This ship, the *Wilhelm*, was built on the Loire and made her way across to the Neckar through the French canals. Further ships were ordered, and with three it was possible to run a daily service, each ship in turn running all the way down to Mannheim and back as far as Heidelberg on the first day, returning to Heilbronn on the second, and lying in port on the third for overhaul and lading. Yet if the Heilbronn merchants and the men of Hassmersheim who manned these vessels were delighted, the ever increasing use of steam, at first on the Rhine and now on its tributaries, led the Committee of the Rhine Sailing Vessels to appeal to the National Assembly in terms strangely

reminiscent of modern trade-unionism. They spoke of money-aristocracy, of labour against capital, of shipping concerns in the direct service of Mammon, and they demanded — but fortunately without the least success — the prohibition of steam towage and the seizure and confiscation of all tugs.

But as the years went by, the Neckar steamers had difficulties of another sort. Step by step the railway advanced from Mannheim to Heilbronn and Stuttgart, and although every effort was made by the shippers to compete by introducing faster and larger ships than before, the passenger trade transferred itself quickly to the rails and within a few years the steamer service on the Neckar was obliged to give up the struggle. For goods traffic the route by water was still cheaper, and it was made more efficient by the service of a powerful tug which operated between Rotterdam and the mouth of the Neckar and hauled only the ships of the Heilbronn to Holland *Beurt*, but from that point they had to progress by other means. Because of the shallow nature of the Neckar itself no steam towage was possible, for to be efficient enough to haul against a stiff current a tug must sit reasonably deep in the water. From Mannheim to Heilbronn the ships had still to be bank-hauled, and with the rates of pay for the drovers spiralling continually upward the navigation of the Neckar in an upstream direction was becoming more and more uneconomic. But for the introduction of the *Kettenschiffe*, the Neckar shipping trade might well have become extinct.

Right up until the canalization of the Neckar these barges without motors made the downstream journey '*frei auf sich selbst*', with no other motive power than the force of the current and the gradient of the river. (In the 1960s this system was still in use on the upper 125 miles of the navigable Weser, and the *Commodore* was to meet ships of up to 600 tons being skillfully steered down its swift bed without even the help of sweeps or poles.) Naturally enough, this mode of navigation was extremely cheap, but in the days before the chain-ships the shipmen had to rely for the upstream journey upon the services of *Halffreiter* or *Halfterer*, most of whom were based on Neckarhausen, below Heidelberg. In that one village alone, more than one hundred towage horses were maintained in the 1870s, and

the coming of the *Hendsemer Löb* was a severe blow to their owners.

The *Halfreiter*, or help-riders, undertook the towage of vessels upstream in the same way that they had done for several hundred years. A train usually consisted of a *Schiff* lading 200 tons, an *Enkernachen* of 110, and a *Rudernachen* of 50. Up to ten horses might be attached to this trio of ships, but the usual team consisted of six. Three horses in line hauled the tow-rope of the *Schiff*, and the leading animal was ridden by the owner of the team. Two horses, with a second man, hauled on the following boat, and a single horse and rider brought up the rear, pulling the smallest ship of the three. Slowly the procession would make its way along the towpath, the *Halfreiter* encouraging their horses with a 'Holla ho!'. Their traditional call could be heard all along the reaches of the Neckar from the middle ages almost until the end of the nineteenth century.

At least two or three such trains of ships, each with their horse teams and riders, moved doggedly up the river in close company, so that the combined horse-power could be used to drag each ship in turn through the swiftest and most difficult passages at Heidelberg, Neckarelz, Wimpfen and elsewhere. At each of these special places further horses were retained to help with the towage up that stretch of the stream. On arrival there, the entire cavalcade would halt and the boats would be hauled one at a time whilst the remainder lay at anchor below the hazard. With the combined teams of each train and the extra animals kept for the purpose, a boat would be dragged up the channel by as many as thirty or forty horses and a dozen or more drovers and it must certainly have been a picturesque sight for visitors to the Neckar valley as the straining steeds hauled together, to the cries of their riders. But it took time, for each ship was delayed while the rest were brought up, and for this reason the journey from Mannheim to Heilbronn took at least six days and at times of high water considerably longer.

The first of the chain-ships, built in Dresden and carried in sections across Germany to be assembled at Neckarsulm, revolutionized the Neckar shipping. When the brave men of Handschuhsheim emerged from the woods to see the fearful beast roaring and screaming in the centre of the stream on its first voyage, it was



towing behind it nine laden craft, as many as an entire company of *Halfreiter* could have managed, and in spite of the delays for passing and for chain-welding, and the stops whilst a ship was cast off, discharged, or recovered after its tow-line had parted, the *Lion* and the *Donkey* could reach Heilbronn in three days at the most, and usually in two. Within months the unfortunate *Halfreiter* were almost extinguished.

The Neckar boatmen of Hassmersheim, Eberbach, Neckarsteinach and the other lesser shipping villages have always lived differently from the skippers of the Rhine, and the distinction still persists. Typical of the Rhine-ship is the great extent of the accommodation, because the captain and his whole family will live aboard their craft and usually have no other home. They move their house with them, as do many of the narrow-boat men in Britain, but whereas the English canal family will somehow manage to live within the compass of two cabins six feet broad and seven feet long, the Rhine skipper may have more space than many a city business man living in an expensive flat, and his saloon will be fitted out in such luxury as would make many a passenger on an ocean liner jealous of the accommodation. With oil-fired central-heating, push-button cooking, modern sofas and chairs, television, and a kitchen which might have come out of the pages of a glossy magazine, the Rhine vessel carries a family home which leaves nothing to be desired. Even the family car may be carried on deck and swung ashore with the derrick when the ship is in port.

The Neckar skipper does not regard the ship as his home. In Hassmersheim, or wherever it may be, he has his house and his garden, and apart from sons or other relations of suitable age who can serve as hands, the family does not usually travel with him. If he should die his widow will employ a *Setzschiffer* or replacement skipper to run the ship, or the management will pass to one of his sons, who then owns it jointly with his mother. Even if this system may slowly be changing, it is still the pride of many a skipper of Hassmersheim that during his lifetime he will be able to put by enough money to provide each of his sons with a ship of his own when the day arrives for the lad to marry and set up house away from his parents.

To the landsman there may appear to be something uncouth and coarse about the bargeman, and yet to be in charge of a Neckar ship, whether in past centuries or today, has always demanded a skill which is usually the counterpart of a sober and serious nature.

*Wir Schiffleut sind kein Höllenband,  
Da sind Sie letz belesen!  
Als unser Herr auf Erden war,  
Wer waren seine Jüngerschar?  
Meist Schiffleut sein's gewesen.*

We shipmen are no devil's band.  
Such judgment is untrue.  
For when our Saviour dwelt with men,  
Who were his true disciples then?  
Most, shipmen were his crew.

So runs a verse of a poem of the Neckar boatmen, concerning a young priest who in his sermon reprimanded the shippers for their godless Sabbath-breaking, their cursing and swearing making it almost impossible for him to hear his own voice in the pulpit. And it reflects something of their simple and pious attitude which even now is not extinct. '*Los in Gottes Namen*' — 'Away, in God's name' — with these words, or the Lord's Prayer, many a Neckar skipper still starts the day when it is time for the deck-hands to make ready to flick the hawsers from the bollards and wash down the ship as she begins to chug up the stream to catch the first lock of the morning.

On our outward voyage we saw little more of Hassmersheim than the lights of the ships, and at the foot of the next lock at Gundelsheim we were naturally obliged to stop. Cautiously sounding for boulders outside the channel we pulled in on the weir-stream side of the long mole below the pen, where we would be well clear of any barge which might come up the reach from Hassmersheim in the dark, and as we turned in we tried to picture what the daylight would show us.

It is this expectation of the unknown which gives a voyage by night its particular delight. Crossing the Ijsselmeer to Lemmer,

putting in at some sleepy little harbour in the Danish archipelago or crossing forty miles of Sweden's greatest lake to Vennersborg, wherever a voyage in the dark might take us we always experienced the same excitement of going to sleep beside a dim and barely discerned quayside with only the red and green glow of the harbour entrance lights to distinguish the place from the blackness of the night, and then awaking in the early light to a scene infinitely more intriguing than we could have imagined. But of all sights revealed to us by the light of early dawn, none was ever more beautiful than that of the town which now lay on the slope a mere two hundred yards across the water from where the *Commodore* had cradled us in the night on the gentle heaving of the flow which bubbled and bounced from the weir. Seen in the yellow, horizontal light as the sun rose over the Swabian countryside, Gundelsheim was superb, and unwittingly we had picked the most perfect point from which to view it. Standing on a knoll in front of the vineyard hills which



spill down from the border of the Odenwald, the great seven-sided block of the former castle of the Master of the Teutonic Order of Knights is topped by a square tower ending in a two-storey hat. The whole magnificent building, deep ochre in colour, and the old part of the town is ringed by a double line of curtain wall, with tower upon tower standing sentinel at every kink or corner like an illustration from a child's book of stories of chivalrous medieval lords and their noble ladies.

We rowed across the river and climbed the steep street of cobbles, past the houses draped with clusters of ripe grapes. Up at the top was the great tithe barn of the former *Hoch-und-Deutschmeister*, and inside it we found an elderly man with a lean face and drooping whiskers seated on a chest. He was a refugee peasant from Yugoslavia, and if he had any regret it was only that he had not emigrated to the rich land of the Neckar in his youth. He had been deported from his homeland for forced labour, but of that he had no complaint, for back home he had toiled harder, and under much worse conditions as a peasant. All the while that he spoke to us he was fashioning a giant ornamental wreath of straw stems which would hang below the oaken king-post of the roof when the farm people gathered on that Saturday night for the dance of the harvest home.

That many of the villagers in this area of Germany were refugees did not greatly surprise us. The German and Russian armies had plundered Europe of men and women and children as ruthlessly as of goods, livestock, and even canal barges. Then had followed the fifteen years of freedom and equality in the 'German Democratic Republic' of the Eastern Zone, such freedom (for party members) and equality of drabness and frustration that hundreds of thousands of families had left everything behind them rather than stay there in a peace that was the peace of the grave. Yet what we had not expected was the lack of regret among those driven into exile from other countries. The Bessarabian lock-keeper above Heilbronn, the Yugoslav farm-worker at Gundelsheim, a Hungarian small-holder in Neckarburken who had proudly shown us the house and garden of his very own, each of these was happy to have found a place in a land which he now

regarded as home, and which was more free of daily economic fears than that from which he had come. And if, so soon after the German armies had pillaged their lands, the Bundesrepublik could be held by all these people in such genuine affection, this was something for which one could be thankful. They, and the families restored to them through the agency of the United Nations High Commissioner and the Refugee Service of the World Council of Churches, were far from wondering how they could sing the lord's song in a strange land. They could sing, and from sheer contentment.

From the top of the sharp Neckar loop at Gundelsheim four castles are visible, the Götzenburg or Hornberg, the Horneck of the Teutonic Order in Gundelsheim itself, the rather uninteresting ruin of Ehrenberg upstream, and the castle of Guttenberg downstream of the town, squatting on the slope above the village of Neckarmühlbach. Almost opposite this castle there happens to be a flooded gravel-pit connecting with the river, and when we returned on our way downstream we slipped through the gap in the bank and appropriated it as a private harbour, rowing back across the Neckar to visit the fortress residence which on our upward journey we had seen only as a dim floodlit shape against the dark of the woods behind.

Guttenberg castle, with the village at its foot, lies on the Neckar loop and away from the road which runs through the valley. For this reason the armies which at various times fought a passage through the Swabian Gate either failed to notice it at all, or did not pause to destroy it. Even in 1945 this was the case, for the United States forces, following the same route as the armies of earlier centuries, occupied Mosbach and Gundelsheim and began to administer the country. After three weeks they had still not noticed the Guttenberg, and they only did so when the mayor of Neckarmühlbach formally called upon the American commander to request that his village should be recognized as existing.

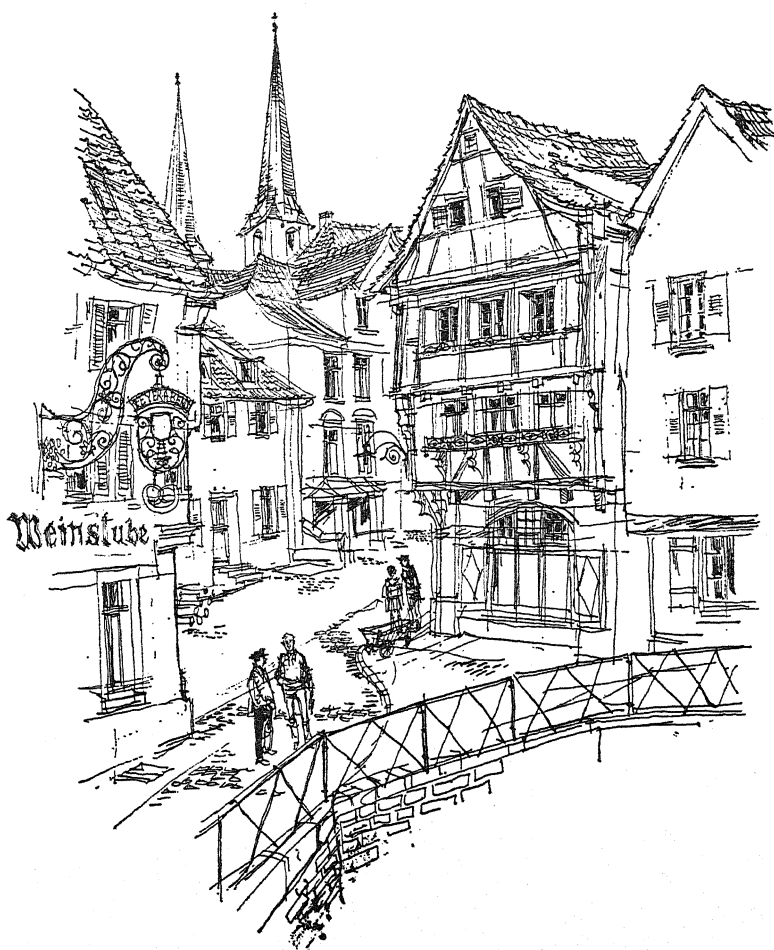
This retired position has enabled the castle to escape the fate of others, and the Gemmingen family who live in it have been able to reside there undisturbed for more than five hundred years. It has no white ladies, ghostly dogs or tales of adolescent daughters fleeing

from heavy-handed fathers, but it possesses something which, if not unique, is very nearly so. There are only two timber libraries in existence, and the other at Kassel on the Fulda is a much smaller one.

The timber library would have delighted John Evelyn, who wrote his monumental work on timber for the Royal Society. It consists of ninety-seven volumes, which tell everything there is to relate about ninety-seven species of tree. Each book is in the form of a box which opens like a backgammon board, the front and back being made of pieces of one of these woods, carefully chosen for their grain. Back and front are made of the bark of the same tree, scraped thin and pressed before being applied, and into the spine is let a small plaque of leather with the German and Latin name of the species, tooled in gold. Yet there are no pages. The open volume displays instead the leaves, the catkins or seeds, the buds, sections of the fruit, and polished slices cut obliquely through the grown timber itself.

At Gundelsheim the long, romantic reach of the Neckar is running to its end. Castles, robber barons and water spirits are left behind with the red sandstone of the forest gorge, and from here to the limit of navigation the country itself is less spectacular, even if the river is still flanked here and there by steep slopes on which the Riesling and Sylvaner vines bask in the sun. Only at Bad Wimpfen does the river decide to make a final show of the extraordinary beauty it can muster. On the edge of Wimpfen the *Limes* crossed the Neckar, and here the Romans had a fort in that part of the town which lies in the valley, and which has for centuries been the source of much of the salt which was the usual cargo to be floated down the river from medieval times until the canalization of the Neckar, when consignments of motor-cars, trucks and lorries began to take to the water and head for Rotterdam and Antwerp, packed in rows upon the decks of the barges which had loaded them at Neckarsulm and Stuttgart.

The Romans themselves may well have shipped or rafted salt from Wimpfen, for they certainly had a station there to collect tolls upon freightage, but it is less likely that they settled the other half of the town, Wimpfen-upon-the-Hill. On the hill it most certainly is, and a steep and zig-zag path leads up the side of the



bluish chalk where the river has swung against the hill, washed away its foot, and rebounded to leave an almost vertical cliff. The village squats tight on the summit, and approaching it by water the boatman sees only the ruin of the handsome arcades of the palace of the powerful Hohenstaufen emperors, and the sturdy Blue Tower which, for all its thirteenth-century strength, is somewhat squashed under the weight of a gothic top-knot added in the nineteenth century in so heavy a style that the whole structure has had to be ringed with bands of iron to prevent it from bursting apart under the strain.

Bad Wimpfen is a resort. On the outskirts it now has saline baths, mud packs, massage, diet, breathing exercises, and everything necessary to attract the sick and the hypochondriac, but tucked away behind the palace of Barbarossa and his successors is the most perfect town of timbered houses to be found anywhere along the Neckar. Most of it dates from after the Thirty Years War, when nine-tenths of the town was destroyed and the place was so impoverished that the wealthy burghers of Nuremberg generously presented the citizens with a new tower for its walls. There was, however, a limit to their magnanimity, for the little Nürnberger Turm with its tiny half-timbered turret has the appearance of having been built several sizes too small. Some of the exquisite houses in the alleys are thin and pinched, as though there was no place to put them, whilst others in the main street reach to seven storeys and perhaps reflect the rich prosperity which was to follow when Wimpfen recovered from fire and plague and poverty.

Down in the valley is the church of St Peter, where in Hohenstaufen times the knights strode proudly up the nave. Today it is the monastery church of a Benedictine brotherhood which, after nearly thirty years of persecution and wandering, at last found a place in which to settle. These monks were driven out of Prague in 1919, and many of them made their way to Silesia, where they settled in Grüssau. Twenty years later, most of them were conscripted and forced into Hitler's army, fourteen of their number being killed. Soon afterwards their monastery was seized by the Gestapo, and the surviving monks expelled to find shelter where best they could, many of them being taken in by farmers and peasants in the villages nearby. When peace came, those who were left began the slow task of rebuilding their community, yet within a year came the peremptory order that they must leave the Soviet Zone, where such things as a charitable order could certainly not be tolerated. Then, led by their abbot, who for more than twenty years had succeeded in holding together at least a fraction of the original brotherhood, they wandered over the border and finally found at Wimpfen a derelict monastic wing attached to the magnificent church. This was a place after their own hearts, and after ten years of tireless labour they succeeded in restoring the deserted monas-



tery at Wimpfen to the flourishing Benedictine community of 'Neu-Grüssau', where they could once again live the life of their order, much as it had been forty years before.

It was while bathing overboard at Wimpfen that we saw a Dutch barge galloping down the river unladen, and acting as a tug for the deck-hand, or perhaps the son of the skipper, who was water skiing down the Neckar with all the suave and easy turning and swivelling of a champion performer. One would hardly imagine it to be possible to indulge in this sport using nothing more than a commercial barge with a speed of seven knots instead of a sleek, chromium-plated, streamlined, hydrofoiled, triple-ply, resin-bonded, ear-drum-splitting speed-boat racing across the surface at several times that speed, but that it could indeed be done the Dutchman showed us as he swooped and twirled away into the distance. The secret lay in multiplication, for although the towing vessel was moving at quite a sedate pace down the Neckar, the skier himself was zig-zagging from side to side of the stream so vigorously that he must have been covering at least four times the distance travelled by the barge, and at a similar increase in his rate of knots.

We ourselves were never tempted to try the same trick, but above Wimpfen we threw three long lines out astern to tow two buoys and a rope ladder, and on these we could be towed idly through the warm water, missing nothing of the scenery and enjoying the delicious rush and bubble around our ears. Towing astern is the most pleasant and effortless of all forms of bathing and on the clean surface of the Neckar it has no drawbacks. It is only if one tries it on waterways such as the Rhine that one ends up, like the patient swans, with a plimsoll line traced neatly and indelibly along one's loading line in the sticky black oil which drops from the unloading berths of the refineries along hundreds of miles of river bank.

Opposite Wimpfen the Jagst and the Kocher both add their waters to the Neckar, and a short way further ahead the navigation leaves the river for a while and passes up two or three miles of canal to enter Neckarsulm, a busy manufacturing town but also one of viticulture, for the hills behind it produce as good a wine

as the Neckar can furnish. Close behind the quay stands another castle of the Hochmeister of the Teutonic Order, the windows of its square tower decked out with shutters in herring-bone stripes. And if the Knights of the Teutonic Order have vanished, their castle is very well worth a visit, for it is now the Two-Wheeler Museum. Once in a year, at Whitsun, its curious inmates are allowed out of their knightly hall to join with other veterans, horseless carriages as well as two-wheelers, in a rally which is Germany's equivalent of the London to Brighton run.

Oldest among the venerable pioneers of the road now stabled in the castle is the machine of the Freiherr von Drais of Karlsruhe, a mere frame and two wheels without anything so elaborate as pedals or brakes, and formed by dismembering a hand-cart, which also provided the steering handle. In the course of time the notion of having a brake seemed desirable, and the earliest form was worked by the handle of a coffee-grinder borrowed from the kitchen quarters and mounted amidships. Then came the day when a French gentleman whose boy had rickets commissioned a coach-builder to design a two-wheeler for the lad to use, and this model was such a success that Napoleon III also ordered one for his son, and thus the cycle achieved status as something which the top people might ride. In fact it became such a rage at court that a score were built for the families of the top twenty, and the first cycle factory of the world came into being.

It was shortly afterwards that the link between sewing-machines and bicycles was forged. Adam Opel, a maker of sewing-machines, ordered five English bicycles as Christmas presents for his five sons. No doubt the boys were thrilled, but their excitement was to be short-lived, for Papa decided to try one of them for himself, and whilst his servants held the machine steady he swung himself over the frame and gave the signal for launching. Alas, he crashed, and deciding that the toys were too dangerous for his youngsters he ordered all five bicycles to be removed at once and sold.

The Opel boys, however, had seen enough to want to own cycles themselves, and banding together they ordered a five-seater, a model of which is in the Neckarsulm Museum. Although it must have been very much more difficult to ride than a single-seater

model, the Opel boys became so proficient that even their father saw that cycling was not necessarily a lethal occupation. It was then that his sons pointed out to him that to be a maker of sewing-machines was not without its dangers either. Poor father, when he travelled about the country selling his mechanical stitchers, was he not frequently stoned by textile workers who saw in his inventions a threat to their livelihood? Why, if he made bicycles as well, he could at least sell these safely without a riot. Adam Opel was soon convinced. He started a bicycle department, from which the modern Opel works were eventually to be developed.

Perhaps sewing-machines and cycles are basically more similar than one might think, for one has only to recall the names of several of the world's makers to notice that they have graduated from the one to the other, and thence to automobiles. Daimler was not a sewing-machine man, but Christian Schmidt was one — or, more precisely, he had a workshop on an island in the Danube valley in which he constructed knitting-machines, the power for the machine tools being provided by a water-wheel. As trade expanded, the island site was too small to meet his needs, and he moved to Neckarsulm. Penny-farthings were now making their appearance on the streets, and in his new mechanical workshop Schmidt began to manufacture these too. Many years later his establishment was to become famous as the NSU works, the name being merely an abbreviation of Neckarsulm. Chassis for horseless carriages were the next introduction, and these were delivered to Herr Gottlieb Daimler, who fitted them with his ingenious internal combustion engines. Eighty years after Schmidt settled in Neckarsulm the NSU works was employing 6000 men and women, many of them from the wine-growing villages of the hills around the town, and as the *Commodore* chugged up the canal towards Heilbronn an occasional barge laden with motor-vehicles would pass her on its way to the docks of the Low Countries.

We did not stop longer than to fuel at the city of the heroine of that romantic story *Kätchen von Heilbronn*. Instead, we continued upstream throughout the afternoon and it was already evening before the *Commodore* was startled to hear a voice hailing her from nowhere. The sound seemed to come from the sky above a placid

reach of country river which curved away sharply around the corner of a wood. Ahead, three laden motor vessels were almost stationary, but the voice did not come from any of them. Nor, on scanning the river, the banks and the sky could we see any angel, *Neckargeist*, Hook-man or indeed so much as a mere human.

Again the voice came, clearly. 'The small motor-ship with the British flag is to pass the other three vessels and proceed into the lock,' it announced.

Although there was no lock in sight, we waved to the invisible author of the command to signal that we understood, and promptly obeyed the order. But on turning the bend we came into a narrow cut and found ahead of us the town of Lauffen, with a lock in which four ships were neatly arranged so as to leave a space for the *Commodore* immediately inside the gates.

As the pen filled, we climbed the ladder and went to the lock office to pay our 45 pfennigs.

'You practise E.S.P.?' we asked.

'E.S.P.?' The lock-keeper was puzzled.

'Extra-sensory perception,' we explained. 'How else could you have known that we were there behind the other ships, half a mile down the river and hidden by the wood? You could not possibly have seen us from here,' we added, looking out of the window towards the town hall and bridge which shut off the view.

'No?' The keeper laughed. 'Take a look for yourselves.' He pointed to the corner of the room, close to the control panel. There a screen was mounted in a cabinet and the greenish-blue picture showed the reach up which we had recently come, with the three barges past which we had been summoned still hovering in mid-stream. On account of the sharp bend which hid the traffic from sight, Lauffen lock was equipped with a closed-circuit television and loud hailer, the camera and loud speakers being placed on the bank at the top of the reach, in a box-structure so inconspicuous that we had not even noticed it.

Kirchheim, Besigheim, Hessigheim, Mundelsheim — the river led onwards round one tight loop after another, past little towns of plain half-timbered houses and along the foot of the hills which were the homes of the best of the Neckar wines. We moored for the

night in the confluence of the Enz and Neckar and next morning drew in against the lock mole at Marbach, rowed across to the shore, and climbed up the hill to the little town above. We were now in the country of Hölderlin and Schiller, and as Marbach itself housed the museum of its own great poet we could hardly run past without visiting the Schiller Foundation. Yet it has to be admitted that a museum devoted to bicycles, ships, or local history, is likely to be much more interesting, for what is there to exhibit which can reflect the genius of a poet or a writer? Only a manuscript or two, or even a dozen, and letters in indecipherable faded pen from contemporaries of which one has never heard. Editions innumerable, commentaries, doctor-theses by men unknown, sketches by artists of no merit, and perhaps — as in the case of the Hans Andersen museum at Odense — the great man's umbrella. On the whole we thought that Schiller came to life more readily in a single ode or in *The Robbers*, painfully learned at school, than in the range of show-cases of notebooks, translations, and dull nineteenth-century print.

Above Marbach the reception accorded to the *Commodore* was somewhat unsettling. As she chugged sedately up the stream, wishing no harm to anyone in the world, she was met by a sudden fusillade of firing from the hillside beyond her port bow. At first we thought a revolution must have broken out in the land of Economic Wonders — or was it perhaps that the great increase in waterborne trade on the Neckar had led to a revival of robber baronry, so that ships were to be held up as they had been long ago by the Bliggers of Neckarsteinach or the lords of Stolzenegg? We could see flashes among the vines on the terraces tightly boxed in their fortifications of white stone walls, but at least we were relieved that no bullets splattered on the water around us. Perhaps some ghost of Hermann Goering, expelled from the beer cellars of Munich, was firing shots through an imaginary ceiling.

And then we saw that the bright flashes came not from rifles or revolvers, but from strips of tin-foil hung upon the stakes of the vines. They were evidently placed there to make the starlings stop and wonder what was going on, and the cannonade was caused by automatic exploders scattered through the terraces in order to

intensify the neuroses of these wicked little enemies of the vintners — for a flock of starlings, dropping in for a few minutes on the way to their evening roosting grounds could dispose of a whole year's vintage. If kept in a state of high nervous tension the birds suffered immediate loss of appetite and would move on to sample the produce of the market gardens on the outskirts of Stuttgart itself, or to raid the orchards of the fruit farmers — where, no doubt, a further bout of gunfire was awaiting them.

Vineyards and orchards, and an occasional village of chequer-board timbered houses flank the higher navigable reaches of the Neckar, and the only piece of High Culture along the sixteen miles of winding course between Marbach and Stuttgart is the palace of Ludwigsburg, which lies hidden from the stream opposite Neckarweiingen. In fact it is a collection of three palaces, the tiny and dilapidated Schloss Favorite set in a woodland park in which the deer have learned to solicit sandwiches from the visitors, the pretty Schloss Monrepos looking out over an ornamental lake, and the huge Palace of Ludwigsburg itself, the former residence of the Dukes of Württemberg.

This palace has its nymphs and chubby cherubs, its hall of mirrors, a ducal theatre, and a chapel on the ceiling of which Grecian figures riot around Moses and Aaron and the brazen serpent whilst the Israelites, classically clad in diaphanous fashions, look on in postures of astonishment. Ludwigsburg is baroque and proud of it, but its finest feature is the magnificent lay-out of ornamental garden with brilliant beds of begonias and salvias, marigolds and mignonette, sweeping away so geometrically from the fountain basin that it seems as though not a single bloom is a centimetre out of place. It is impossible to see the gardens of Ludwigsburg without being convinced that such a show is precisely what one would wish to plant along the side of the lawn, back home in England, but second thoughts are inevitable when one begins to count the number of plants per square yard, multiplies the figure by the size of one's own flower-beds, infinitely humble though they may be when compared with those of the Palace of the Dukes, and then again multiplies the product by the price of even the cheapest bedding begonias. Regretfully one

decides that next year it will be asters and zinnias again after all.

Baroque gardens can be splendid. Edgeways on, they are not particularly impressive except perhaps as a mass of colour, but seen from above they can be delightful — particularly if as a backcloth there is a palace laid out on the same grand scale and with a proper disregard of cost. And at Ludwigsburg the palace, for all its interminable gallery of individual portraits of dull dukes and duchesses, provides a splendid setting, and the fall of the ground allows the visitor to see all the twists and curls and scrolls of flowerbeds in their proper magnificence.

It is part of the Economic Wonder that at Stuttgart the river of Hölderlin and Schiller, of rich wines and student songs, of languishing maidens and crafty water-spirits, should broaden out into a bustling port where the inland freighters of the Rhine nations unload coal, grain, oil and ores beneath modern grabs and gantries and extractors along several miles of quays laid out at a height of more than 700 feet above sea-level. The harbour itself cost four million pounds, and the locks and dredging and other works which were needed to build out the Neckar so that ships lading 1350 tons could reach the port from Mannheim ran to more than thirty million. Coming as she did from a land where the total government expenditure on all the national waterways had only reached six million pounds in the last fifteen years, the *Commodore* felt so humbled by the activity of this newest of the European inland ports that instead of joining the Rhein-Herne-Canal barges and the Rhine tankers in the city harbour she found herself a discreet berth beside the lock of Canstatt below it.

As at Baden-Baden, so also at Canstatt the Romans had once wallowed luxuriously in the hot flow of the springs. Their successors, the modern businessmen of Stuttgart, relax in their tubs and saunas, keeping thrombosis at bay with steam and carbonic acid and sunshine seasoned with a glass or two of clear Swabian wine, and so copious are the springs that the water below the lock of Canstatt is warm enough to provide a pleasant bath — particularly on the side away from the sewage effluent. Yet in spite of the springs and the television tower on a hill-top behind the town we did not find much in Stuttgart to detain us, and two days later we

turned the *Commodore's* head and set her running towards the Rhine.

Wimpfen and Gundelsheim, Eberbach and Hirschorn and Neckarsteinach, one by one the waterside towns with their castles were left astern. Beyond Heidelberg we could look back at the receding line of hill-tops where the Odenwald fell down to the plain, and as they faded away we took our turn in the last of the twenty-two locks at Feudenheim, to emerge amid the foam of white-washing powders into the straight reach which led to Mannheim.

*Dir, o stilles Tal, Gruss zum letztenmal,  
Sing mir zur letzten Stunde beim Abendschein.*

So run the final lines of a folksong which sings the beauty of a Swabian valley.

Farewell, o valley with thy soft, silent flow,  
Sing at my passing in the twilight glow.

It was not evening twilight but early morning when the *Commodore*, her engine humming a contented song of her own, passed the last of the Neckar wharves and let the current of the greater river snatch her and whisk her away to whatever might lie further down the valley of the Rhine.



## VI

*City of Reformation — Willegis of Mainz — origin of  
printers' errors — the end of a voyage — off to Bavaria —  
Frankfurt — the Lower Main — the bell in the river —  
Aschaffenburg — the Royal Bavarian Chain-ships*

From the very centre of the bridge in the city of Constance, far above its present limit of navigation, the Rhine is measured off with such accuracy that a barge-skipper has only to glance towards the shore to know exactly where he is. Each kilometre is marked with its number painted boldly upon the wall, or on a signboard. Every half is marked with a cross, every tenth of a kilometre with a single stroke.

When the *Commodore* had emerged from behind the Strasbourg harbour mole she joined the river just below the mark of 295·6. Now, at the Neckar point, she was at Km. 428·2, and her immediate destination was Mainz, where the Main and Rhine have their confluence at Km. 496·6. There she hoped to find a suitable berth where she might put up her feet until the following spring whilst we ourselves returned to England by train and packet-boat. Much of the Rhine would still lie ahead of her, for at Rotterdam the kilometre marks would be in four figures.

The forty-five miles of Rhine from Mannheim to Mainz are probably the least interesting of any reach upstream of Duisburg and the Ruhr. Once again the river flows through nowhere in particular, its modern channel here and there cutting across a former loop which has been left to the birds and the fishes. Only at Worms does it touch civilization ancient or modern, and in the case of this once imperial city it washes the edge of Roman history as well as the destruction of more modern times. Terribly destroyed though it was in the Second World War, Worms is an ecclesiastical city almost without equal. On all sides spires and domes rise beyond

what remains of the town walls, some parts of which are medieval and galleried, others Roman. But it was not the Romans who drew us to sweep round the promontory and draw in at the foot of an oily ladder in the dusty commercial harbour of Worms. It was more that as a free church vessel the *Commodore* could not decently pass by the place where the first great Reformation of the Church had been debated before bishops and clergy, lords and counts, electors and nobility. If we made over rather cautiously towards the harbour entrance, it was partly to avoid collision with any vessel which might be coming out from behind the mole, but also for fear of running aground. No shallows were marked, but we had already noticed on the river bank the giant figure of the wicked Hagen casting the hoarded treasure of the Nibelungen into the river, and if he had really done so we had no wish to rip the *Commodore's* planking on a shoal of gold and jewels.

Worms is proud of its exalted past, and near the cathedral its claims are boldly announced on a plaque. 'This is one of the most memorable sites of the Western world. Here was the holy temple area of the Romans, the royal fortress of the Nibelungen, the imperial palace of Charlemagne, the court of the lord bishops of Worms. More than a hundred gatherings of empire and earldom were held on this spot, and here there stood before emperor and empire Martin Luther.'

As for the Nibelungen, it may be that without the patronage accorded to Wagner by that eccentric and artistic ruler Ludwig II of Bavaria they would hardly have become known around the world, but Martin Luther was in a very different category. It was in the year 1517 that this vigorous priest and translator of the Bible, raging at the sale of indulgences by the Dominican Tetzl to raise money for the Papacy, nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church his ninety-five theses. Tetzl burned them publicly at Frankfurt-on-the-Oder; the students of Wittenberg then burned Tetzl's replies. The argument grew more furious until in 1520 the Pope issued a bull against Luther, which he burned amid scenes of wild enthusiasm. In the following spring the first diet of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was to meet at Worms, and to it the obstinate priest was summoned. His trial was only a minor item on

the agenda, but his progress to the city resembled a royal triumph. That the Reich declared against Luther made no difference, and though it is probably true that few modern Catholics would regret the blast of reform which he brought to blow away the accumulated disorders of centuries, the diet was to prove a turning-point in the history of the world. The western church, already long sundered from its fossilized eastern orthodox counterpart, was cleft from top to bottom. The way was open for fierce intolerance, for wars of religion, for persecutions unprecedented and for burning and murder of Christian by Christian.

And yet it was open for freedom, too. Freedom to discuss, to try to find the truth rather than to accept dogma authoritatively pronounced. Open for scholarship, Biblical criticism, experimentation in liturgical affairs and church order. Without the trial of Luther in the Rhine city of Worms the Church in the modern world might never have found a new purity of vision, and the World Council of Churches — a union founded upon joint ministry and understanding, common service and action — would still be no more than a dream. Or perhaps quite undreamed of, even now.

If some of those present at the trial may have thought that the differences between orthodox and protesting churchmen could be patched up, they were to be disappointed. In 1557 two wise and learned men, Luther's friend Melancthon and his fellow theologian and scholar Canisius, met in Worms to discuss in sober deliberation the many points which divided Catholic and Protestant. Their joint communiqué had a strangely modern and diplomatic ring, for it stated that no agreement could be reached on any of the points at issue. There was in fact no bridge to be found which might span the gulf between Church and Church. Luther's figure, surrounded by all the great figures of the Reformation, stands solidly in the centre of Worms, cast in massive immovable nineteenth-century bronze which seems to give extra emphasis to his words declared on the base — 'Here I stand, I can no other.'

Between Worms and Mainz the *Commodore* carried us down a page of the wine list, and on the left bank of the river the vineyard ridge of Oppenheim and Nierstein proclaimed the identity of the various vineyards in lettering large enough to cheer the con-

noiseurs speeding past in the Rheingold express, or the thirsty barge-hands on the river who had no opportunity to stop to sample the vintages for themselves. Yet scenically the Rhine was in no way notable, and we were glad when at last the railway bridge of Mainz itself came into view just above the confluence of the two great rivers.

Though to a lesser degree than Worms, Mainz is another city of Romans, emperors and ecclesiastics, and its arms recall that genial character Bishop Willegis, a sincere man beloved of the humbler people from whose ranks he had risen to rule over one of the greatest bishoprics in the empire. Yet as the son of a waggoner Willegis was by no means so acceptable to the aristocracy and the wealthy traders, and they sent out their servants to draw cart-wheels on the walls and doors of his house in order to remind him of his humble origin. But the bishop was by nature the humblest of men, and it is said that when he saw the rudely drawn wheels he instructed a master painter to paint them better, drawing a white wheel on a red background on the walls throughout the episcopal lodgings. Underneath each wheel the painter was to spell out a rhyme:

*Willegis, Willegis,  
denk woher du kommen bis*

Lest even then he might forget whence he had come, the good bishop had the wheel of a plough hung over his bed, so that already as he awoke each morning he would remember not to be tempted to take pride in his position.

If there is one single man whose connection with Mainz must be known the world over, that individual is Johannes Gansfleisch (or Goose-flesh), who himself adopted the less ludicrous name of Gutenberg and whose family were to become well-known for their passenger shipping services on the Rhine. Of the great printer himself it is said that his activity aroused the anger of the devil, who was not at all pleased that the Bible — which, apart from anything else, contained some unpleasant words about him — could now be manufactured in such quantity that it would before long be available to all. So, just as any good devil would do, he

considered how best he might upset the project. Undecided as to his best plan, he disguised himself as a travelling scholar, and one evening he crept into the printing works and hid behind a type cabinet to see precisely what went on. Soon he saw Master Gutenberg pouring molten lead into little moulds and putting the miniature castings into the frame of a primitive pressing machine. So curious did the devil become that he sauntered out, greeted Gutenberg in the most friendly fashion, and asked him what he was doing.

The printer whispered mysteriously that the matter was a dark secret, but that he could assure his visitor that by this means the most powerfully magical volumes of all the world were being turned out at the rate of more than one hundred every night, books which would travel over land and sea and affect people wherever they went.

The prospect of causing so much mischief delighted the devil so greatly that he offered his immediate help, and he stayed all night to work the handle of the press whilst Gutenberg laid the paper on the type and quickly whisked each sheet away as soon as it was printed. It was dawn before the devil saw upon one of the sheets which the master printer did not remove quickly enough from the press the words *Novum testamentum*. Wild with rage he stormed out of the shop, no doubt leaving a slight scent of sulphur dioxide behind him.

If Gutenberg had tricked the devil, so now the devil resolved to bring a blight upon all such men and their work for ever, and he summoned scores of thousands of devil-children from Hell to help him. And nobody who has any dealings at all with printers will doubt that they are still at work, causing the wrong letters to fall into the Monotype, dropping whole lines, and sometimes making an author say things which make him blush when he sees his own words so strangely transmuted in the proofs.

Arrived at Mainz we were uncertain where to lay up the *Commodore*, for unlike the Thames the Rhine has very few facilities for ships unless they are tankers or other craft of large dimensions, and we felt rather as one might if one were to approach the sales department of the British Motor Corporation and enquire

whether they could look after a child's pedal-car. But as usual when in doubt we made for the office of the *Wasserschutzpolizei*, which here was in a tower on the opposite side of the river. As we were so shortly to leave for England we took out a spare tin of coffee and a pound of tea and climbed the outside staircase to the spy-room, which commanded a superb view of the river and the city across the stream. Having introduced ourselves we told the police inspector that we had a problem, and we asked if he and his colleagues would be so extremely obliging as to relieve us of a small quantity of tea and coffee.

The inspector was courteous, but cautious. He was also admirably trained, for when we proffered our gift of provisions he pushed them back across the table as though they were radioactive and might contaminate any who touched them. The police, he said, could not accept bribes.

Bribes? We had not the least intention of bribing the worthy police, we said. We had no need to bribe anyone. We had merely come to enlist their aid over a matter in no way criminal, and it had occurred to us that with coffee and tea so highly taxed in the land of economic marvels a pound of each could find a good use in the police station when the officers, worn and tired from their voyages of ceaseless vigil on the turbulent waters, returned to the cosy warmth of the duty room. It was not a bribe, but a gift. And we pushed the goods back over the table towards him.

The police could not accept gifts, the inspector said. He read the labels on the packets, but once again he shoved the present back to us. If the police could help us, that was a different matter. The *Wasserschutzpolizei* were at the service of every mariner. There was no need for us to think otherwise.

We said we would shortly be leaving for England. We could not spend the whole night drinking gallons of tea and coffee, and by next spring it would have deteriorated. And as he still remained unmoved we assured him that if he would open the window we would at once cast the offending provisions out into the Rhine. Would this not be a terrible waste?

On reflection, the officer agreed that it would be a stupid action, but that it was entirely our affair. The police could not accept gifts.

We then asked him if he would have any objection to our leaving the items for the police to dispose of them, rather than pollute the Rhine with tea and coffee. This, he thought, might perhaps be done, and we were allowed to take the goods downstairs to the room where the officers kept their private belongings. Another policeman opened the door of a locker and stood with his back squarely towards us, staring blankly out of the window so that he could not actually see whether or not we put our gifts inside. With honour satisfied, we closed the cupboard and he led us back upstairs again, where we were received with the greatest courtesy and friendliness imaginable. Then we explained that we wanted to find a berth where we could leave the *Commodore* in safety and under reliable care.

The inspector did not immediately answer. Evidently he had something on his mind, and when at last he came round to speak of it we were surprised to find that it was not the coffee which was worrying him. There might, he said, be several places where the *Commodore* could be laid up, and he would take the hypothetical case of Herr X's wharf. Now he did not wish us for one moment to think that he would say anything which might reflect upon the character of anyone. For example, if he were to tell us that Herr X was a most unsatisfactory man, that yachts left in his care had been neglected, that accounts were rendered for work not actually done, that anything of value aboard would disappear and the workmen in the yard would all swear that whatever it was that was missing had never been there in the first place — if, in fact, he were to tell us all this it would seem as though he were denigrating the individual in question. So, undoubtedly true though these facts were, he would leave them unsaid. Herr X was a rogue, and nobody knew it better than the water police. You could see the man was a crook even if you were three parts blind in both eyes, but he would not like us to think he was telling us this. No, no, certainly not. Never must the police take away the fair name and reputation of any man, except perhaps inadvertently during criminal proceedings. He was only hinting that less punctilious and honourable men than the *Wasserschutzpolizei* might conceivably wish to say these things of Herr X, and if so they would be dead

right. Were there not scoundrels in every country? Maybe, but if he thought it his duty not to say what others, for lack of proper restraint, might allege about the individual in question, it was not that he wished us, as strangers to be deceived. That he would not like, and he would suggest that we left the *Commodore* elsewhere. In fact the police would escort us down the river to Amöneburg, to the yard of the Schmidt brothers, where we would be in excellent hands. The fact that the police themselves used the Amöneburg yard was recommendation enough, and he himself would at once telephone the Schmidts and tell them to expect us.

So down the river we went, two of us aboard the *Commodore* and two invited as guests aboard the 30-knot hydrofoil police-craft which skated along the surface like a jet-driven water boatman, surging round in a wide circle every few minutes to swoop back and see that we were still there.

The small shipyard of Mainz-Amöneburg lay behind a long eyot, and there the *Commodore* remained at anchor throughout the winter, looking out from the backwater to watch the traffic streaming endlessly by. When we returned in the following spring she was delighted to see us, and she was as anxious as we were to stock up with water, fuel and food, and head for Bavaria. We had a particular reason for making our Bavarian voyage in 1960, and our visit to the Neckar in the previous year had been part of a plan which was intended to leave the *Commodore* within reasonable navigational range of the Bavarian mountains and Oberammergau. This was one of the infrequent years when the Oberammergau Passion was to be acted, and we were determined that we would go there. For myself it was to be the fourth time I had seen that starkly unadorned drama, and for my wife the second, but from the moment we had visited Oberammergau together in 1950 we had counted the years until we might go again. Now at last 1960 was here and rehearsals were in full swing. This time we would go by *Commodore*, and even if she could not actually scale the mountains and descend into the Ammer valley we would let her take us as far in that direction as she could.

As late as 1951 we could have penetrated to within 115 miles of Oberammergau itself by following the Main to Bamberg and taking



the Ludwigs Canal to its junction with the Danube at Kelheim, but in that same year this only link between the Rhine and Danube was closed to traffic and it was now being reconstructed as a major shipping route to link Rotterdam with the Black Sea, but the work was scheduled for completion in 1969. Meanwhile we should have to be content to reach a suitable point on the Bavarian reaches of the River Main, but this would still bring us within 200 miles of Oberammergau itself.

Of the Main we knew little, except that Frankfurt was upon it. We had, however, the accounts of two earlier voyages by men who had taken small boats from the North Sea to the Black Sea. In *A Cruise Across Europe* (1906) Donald Maxwell told of how he and a friend set out in the *Walrus* from Willemstad in Holland — a favourite harbour of the *Commodore* — dragging the ship the entire way through the Bavarian canal by bank-hauling. A later voyage was that of Negley Farson, whose *Sailing Across Europe* (1926) described the voyage of the *Flame*, and although this craft had an engine of sorts the Farsons themselves were reduced to bank hauling because of the weed in the canal. Even at that time, a quarter of a century before the closure of the route, they could report that 'in the old days the weeds were cut, and one can still see the scows. But now the Ludwig's Canal is almost deserted — a veritable inland Sargasso Sea'.

The Main terminates in depressing fashion as a black stain of filthy water disfiguring the cool steely grey of the Rhine far below the confluence opposite Mainz, for this magnificent stream which carries away the water from the Franconian hills and forests suffers a worse fate than its sister, the Neckar. It is not mere telly-bred detergent which is added to the Main, but the most revolting products of industries at Frankfurt and Aschaffenburg, among them the effluent of paper mills. These mills somehow manage to produce a material which resembles chewed blotting paper (and may well be precisely that), but which coagulates, sinks, decays, and rises to the surface again as a stinking mass of corruption seething with methane and strangely resembling sewage. Not that sewage-processing plants are altogether absent from the lower Main, either.

Even as far downstream as Amöneburg the mixing of the two rivers is not complete, and behind our eyot the water was mostly derived from the tributary and was both darker and of a different odour from that of the main flow in mid-river. But we knew that once we had passed its industrial reaches the Main must surely be sweet and clean, and impatient to see what it held in store for us we set off on our voyage, turning the point of the island to head into the swift Rhine current. Battling her way tenaciously up the centre of the river to pass through the single navigation arch of the railway bridge, the *Commodore* struggled yard by yard to pass the barges and hawsers of a half-mile long Swiss tow-train which itself was overhauling a Dutch one moving at an infinitesimally slower pace. Together we flung the river into convulsive standing waves over which the down-coming traffic splashed and sprayed as it burst through between us. It took the *Commodore* forty minutes to reach the police station, but from there she could cut in behind some anchored ships to take the slacker water, and soon she was passing the 0.0 km. board of the Main — for this river is marked from the mouth upwards whereas the Rhine is measured downwards to the sea. Two miles ahead, beyond the not unattractive waterfront of the hamlet of Kostheim, we drew up outside the first of the thirty-two locks, each of them more than a sixth of a mile in length, which were to raise us four hundred feet or more above the level of the Rhine at Mainz. Beyond the lock we could see the hill and village of Hochheim, famous through centuries for the Hochheimer wine which, crudely pronounced by inexperienced English tongues, came to be known as *hock*, and obligingly lent its name as a generic term for all the wines of the area.

Of the twenty miles of river up to Frankfurt, Farson had nothing whatsoever to say, and Maxwell related no more than that there were six locks. (He was mistaken; there were in fact only five.) Today the river is even more industrialized, but the locks have been reduced to three double ones in order to speed the flow of the heavy traffic — for Frankfurt alone has a turnover of more than five million tons of cargo annually, quite apart from the coming and going of the passenger steamers of the Köln-Düsseldorfer Line. Yet the coaling yards and docks and refinery basins are on the

outskirts of the city, and in the centre of Frankfurt the river opens out to a waterfront more attractive than that of any other large city in Germany with the possible exception of Düsseldorf. Ahead lies the handsome footbridge of the Eisener Steg, leading directly towards the cathedral and the Römer, the ancient city hall which is one of the few buildings of medieval Frankfurt to have escaped total destruction in the Second World War, even if the glorious narrow alleys of carved and gabled houses of the wealthy merchants have vanished without trace. Along the river wall is a promenade with flower-beds and lawns and a double row of trees, pruned and chopped and trained and twisted to provide a shady canopy hundreds of yards in length, and so unexpectedly pleasant is the scene that one can draw in, shut one's ears to the din of the rush-hour traffic, and forget the inky blackness of the water in the sheer delight of the prospect of the city centre. Outside the rush-hour the air may be still enough for the tinkle of the carillon of the Nicolaikirche to carry down to the water and float away along the reach just as it did when the young Goethe, clad in his mother's cloak of scarlet, glided down the frozen river on his skates to sweep elegantly in and out of the pillars of the bridge below and return, his cheeks as flushed with the winter cold as was his heart with romance, and execute a graceful pirouette beside the beautiful girl who was the latest temporary passion of his gay heart.

The five locks through which Maxwell passed were built in the 1880s, and represented the first canalization of the Main from the mouth up to Frankfurt for ships of up to 1000 tons. These locks were no more than one-quarter the size of their successors, and being only some 260 feet long they were too small to pass the rafts of logs brought down from the Franconian forests, which were provided with a special bypass of their own. On the right bank of the river there was a drum-weir which could be opened to form a waterchute, and the rafts of many hundreds of pine and spruce stems would shoot through the gap into the reach below, falling in the case of the Offenbach lock as much as nine feet as they did so. To travel down the steps must have been an exhilarating experience for anyone fortunate enough to persuade the lumbermen to let him travel with them, but this particular sport was doomed to die when

the second canalization was put in hand during the 1930s, and the five locks were reduced to three. Not only would the fall — nearly fifteen feet in one case — have been a dangerous one to negotiate, but a raft of several thousand tons of timber rushing down such an incline could give some unpleasant shocks to the shipping if it should get out of control. Besides, the new barrages had hydro-electric works attached and their head of water could not be dropped every time a raft was to come by.

The Eiserner Steg dates from before the canalization, and this explains the zig-zag flight of steps which leads up to it at either end. When the locks and weirs were built between Mainz and Frankfurt the big ships could at last come up the river. Unfortunately such ships could not pass underneath two of the Frankfurt bridges, and both the Old Bridge and the Eiserner Steg had to be raised by several feet. The first of these was reconstructed, but the footbridge was simply jacked up and put on the higher abutments.

The Commodore is not a ship which feels at home in cities, and if she stayed patiently in Frankfurt to allow us to visit the opera she was as anxious as we were to make an early start on the following morning and chug upstream through the seven more locks which separated her from Aschaffenburg, where the forest reaches of the river would be within sight. She still had plenty of traffic to keep her company, and often she would have to wait for nearly an hour below one of the locks whilst the tugs and tows were laboriously moved out of the pen or into it. A holiday motorist who found himself having to wait even for ten minutes at a level crossing several times in the course of a morning would probably feel frustrated, and to wait for an hour would certainly put him into such a temper that even his family (in a similar state of annoyance) would hardly dare speak to him, but mild delays on the water are not particularly aggravating. One is not in a hurry — or one would not be travelling by boat at all — and there is always something to be seen. More than that, one is rarely waiting alone, and if it takes a crash or a major earthquake, or some imagined hostile piece of driving, to make motorists exchange even the curtest of remarks, those who go by water are more naturally and readily inclined to talk. For the art of navigation, on inland waters as well as upon the

open sea, breeds a certain easy, confident and courteous open-heartedness unknown to the land voyager. Barriers of class and race and irrational national pride sink to the bottom of the stream, and prejudices are voided overboard by the bilge-pump to join them. It is no false matiness or condescension that brings shipmen to talk to each other so readily and easily, and if shoes and sealing-wax do not figure largely in midstream conversations below the locks and weirs, ships are a topic natural enough. And so it was that when paying a social call upon the tug of a dredger we were fortunate enough to come upon a skipper who had spent much of the war in an occupation which we envied, for his task had been to take small German gunboats from the Rhine to the Black Sea by way of the Main and the Danube and the intermediate link of the Ludwig's Canal. That the journey took a quarter of a year, much of it spent in freeing the propellers from the entwining weed of the almost derelict canal, had not worried him, for he was not a man of military style and efficiency. He had loved every moment of those trips, and if the boats were so damaged by the voyage that they were almost unusable what did that matter compared with the delights of a cruise through such grand scenery at the Führer's expense?

The Main between Aschaffenburg and Frankfurt is not without interest. At Hanau the stream cuts close beside the palace of the counts of that place, and above the lock of Grosskrotzenburg it washes the very edge of Seligenstadt. Blessed should that place for ever be where at last he found his daughter, Charlemagne is said to have declared — and hence, it is claimed, the name of the little town which opens out its charming market-place towards the river and the ferry, giving the boatman a brief hint of the delights of the Franconian villages which still lie half a day's voyage upstream. Whether or not Charlemagne ever went there, his fame is eclipsed locally by that of the two painters Hans Memling, who was born in the town, and Matthias Grünewald, who was a burgher of Seligenstadt for many years, working not only in his profession of hydraulic engineer — in which capacity he built municipal fountains in several German cities — but travelling to Colmar in Alsace to paint for the monastery of the Antonites at Isenheim the

astounding Crucifixion and Resurrection which were to open an entirely new chapter in the history of art, and which we ourselves had seen when the *Commodore* had carried us to the Colmar basin a year before with no other object than to visit the Unterlinden museum where they are now displayed.

Like so many of the waterside towns of Germany, Seligenstadt lacked a quayside and we were unable to stop there on our way up the river, but in the view of the market and basilica across the water we had already seen it at its finest, and as Grünewald was here no more than a memory we were content to forge ahead towards a land where we knew that we should be able to see for ourselves at least one or two more examples of his work. At Stockstadt lock we were to leave the lower Main astern. Just above it the long basins of the port of Aschaffenburg led off from the stream, and the water was flecked with iridescent oil and thickly sprinkled with floating islands of pink scum mixed with black turgid masses of filth buoyed up by the bubbles of their own decomposition. And then, quite suddenly, we passed into greenish water, clean and odourless, healthy enough for flowering rushes to grow along the banks and for the ducks bobbing upon our wash to display the colours of their own spring plumage instead of the brownish-black of oil which, further down the river, had given them a curiously uniform appearance. Close ahead of us a low cliff sloped back on the port side and on its top was perched the Pompeianum, a curious folly designed as a replica of a Roman villa. Beyond, the magnificent four-square Johannisburg, the Renaissance palace of the lord bishops of Mainz, towered above an abrupt rockface of red sandstone.

*Kling klang glorian!  
Unsere Schwester Susann  
Liegt im Main  
Beim grauen Stein  
Kehrt nimmer heim.  
Kling klang!*

So sing the children of Aschaffenburg to this day, and their ditty recalls the legend that the church of St Agatha once had not only

one great bell but two. When Gustavus Adolphus occupied the city these treasures were among those which were promptly earmarked for removal, and no doubt they would now be adorning the church of the Knights in Stockholm or the chapel of one of the Swedish royal palaces, but for an unfortunate mishap when the first of the pair, Susann, had been loaded aboard a vessel at the foot of the cliff. The ship had only gone a hundred yards down the river when it struck upon a reef below the site of the Pompeianum, and tilted so suddenly that Susann jumped swiftly overboard into the deep water and made good her escape. There she still lies, the children sing, and indeed if one listens carefully the remaining bell of St Agatha can be heard distinctly to toll its plaintive cry. 'Bim bam, Bim bam; where is sister, Susann?' Yet only the very best behaved of children are privileged to catch the faint reply which issues from the water. 'Bim bam, Bim bam; here I am, Mariann.'

That Gustavus Adolphus possessed himself of Aschaffenburg is historic enough, for he marched up the Main valley sacking and destroying everything but the best works of art as he went. And if Aschaffenburg was not looted, this is said to be because Bernhard, the abbot of the Capuchin monastery, had the courage to go out to meet the Swedish king and forestall a bombardment by offering him the keys of the city and charging him not to treat its people too savagely. As the conqueror marched into the city his acquisitive eye fell upon the splendid palace of the bishops, an edifice infinitely finer than anything to be seen in his own country, and naturally enough he wished that he might transport this too to Sweden, along with the more portable statuary which his soldiers so assiduously and carefully removed as they pressed up the valley.

'If it were only on wheels, I would transport it to Stockholm,' he said — having apparently overlooked in his enthusiasm that he would still have been obliged to ship the building across the Öresund strait at Helsingborg. 'But as it has none, I shall give its riches to my soldiers.'

'One moment, your Majesty,' Bernhard the abbot interrupted. 'If you can supply the horses you may certainly remove it. See, it is already fitted with wheels.' He pointed at the carvings above the windows, where indeed there was no lack of spoked cartwheels, the

same wheels which Bishop Willegis the carter's son had introduced as the emblem of the bishops of Mainz.

This is said to have been one of those timely and risky jests which altered the fate of a city. King Gustavus was so amused that he spared Aschaffenburg, and it is related that he even overcame his religious scruples sufficiently to pay a visit to the monastery and greet the abbot most cordially, declaring him to be the sole cause of the deliverance of the city from the fate which otherwise he would certainly have dealt out to it.

Although Gustavus Adolphus spared the Johannisburg, the bombs of the Second World War did not, and the magnificent palace was burned out from end to end. If now its glory is slowly and painfully being revived, this is because somebody conceived the brilliant idea of transforming it into a state school for masons, so that under the hammers and chisels of apprentice craftsmen the original statues and carvings might little by little be recut in fresh blocks of the same rosy Odenwald sandstone, to replace the split and fire-stained remnants of what must once have been an exterior of astonishing splendour. And apart from the palace, Aschaffenburg has many other treasures. The cloistered Stiftskirche is renowned as the place for which Grünewald was commissioned by his patron the lord bishop of Mainz to paint the panels on the Maria Schnee altar, parts of which are in the museum at Freiburg, another panel (the Stuppach Madonna) being in a village church on a tributary of the Main further upstream. The original frame, with a copy of this same madonna, hangs in the gallery at the rear of the Stiftskirche, and in a side chapel is the equally famous '*Beweinung Christi*' which was once the predella of another altar now lost. For the most part the work of Grünewald, this is certainly one of his finest, and although only the two hands of Mary are portrayed above the bent body of Christ, they at once give the most overpowering sensation of grief. There is also a resurrection by Cranach, as different as can be from a Grünewald although painted within a year of two of the *Beweinung*, and an astonishingly powerful crucifixion carved in wood with all the simplicity of line and curve of the very best modern sculpture, but which is in fact a masterpiece from eight centuries ago. And



strangely enough the two very different skills of Master Matthis, or Grünewald, are combined as nowhere else in the font which is believed to be the earliest of all his works. He certainly painted its exterior in his capacity as painter by appointment to the lord bishop, and no doubt he was able to exercise a little of his skill in plumbing and hydraulics to ensure that the font itself was as sound and leak-proof as he could make it.

The works of art in the Stiftskirche and elsewhere are sufficiently known, and a visitor will find them described in detail in a guide-book. But he is much less likely to realize, even if he should see it, that another object in Aschaffenburg is a treasure of a very different kind. That we discovered it ourselves was to some extent sheer luck, for had we not noticed the small harbour basin lying tight beneath the wall of the terraced cliff on which the palace of the bishops stands, we should certainly have missed making the acquaintance of a K.B.K.S.

The little harbour seemed to us an ideal place in which to halt whilst visiting the Stiftskirche and buying such stores as we needed. It was protected from the surge of the passing barges, and by sounding as we took the *Commodore* cautiously through the entrance we found that there was plenty of water under her keel. A collection of dinghies, fishing-punts and canoes made up most of the fleet within the port, and apart from a few small craft with outboard motors the only other vessel was one which had so vast a hull that it was able to carry on its low deck a boat-store for canoes and a restaurant. The proprietor was a gentle but powerful Bavarian, a retired skipper of the river, and as soon as he saw the *Commodore* nosing into the basin he came out to welcome her, signalling to us that we might make her fast alongside.

As we drew in to moor against the curious black hull we wondered at first why it was so oddly shaped to slope away gently towards the water at either end, somewhat in the style of a ferry. In fact it was much too large a vessel to be a Main or Rhine vehicle ferry, and below the deck which now carried the restaurant it showed a long row of portholes. Altogether it was a most unusual craft, and it was a while before we realised that this ship had been no ordinary barge or passenger steamer but something very

different. The upper works and single funnel and the machinery were no longer there, but we were now so sure that she was indeed one of the remarkable royal craft of the Main that we hurried aboard to speak with her owner.

Was it, could it really be a K.B.K.S.? Proudly he answered that it was indeed such a vessel, and that if we stepped into the restaurant we should see on the wall a fine photograph of her taken by a bargemaster forty years earlier and showing her in all her original glory, clawing her way up the Main as the *Königliches Bayerisches Ketten-Schiff II*, one of the eight Royal Bavarian Chain-Ships which until the canalization of the Main above Aschaffenburg had hauled the barges all the way to Bamberg. It might have been the same ship which had towed Donald Maxwell, 'a hideous towing steamer' he had called her, 'the persistent clanking of the chain as it ran over the iron deck exceedingly depressing.' Or perhaps it was the one grappled as it came past by Farson, the roving reporter of the *Chicago Daily News*, who found it 'a marine architect's nightmare. Her decks were rusty and wet; a horrible crunching came from her vitals as she digested the beginning of her 190 miles of steel chain'. Dirty and noisy though she must have been, the photograph in the floating restaurant showed *K.B.K.S.II* under way as a graceful and majestic ship, very imperial and exceedingly proud, and if we regretted once again that this extraordinary species of boat was now no longer running we were at least delighted that the *Commodore* had made the acquaintance of a torso in a reasonable state of preservation.

The *K.B.K.S.II* at Aschaffenburg is not the only survivor of the days of the chain-ships. We ourselves were to find the hull of *K.B.K.S.IV* serving as a Chandler's store in the commercial harbour at Würzburg, and to see scale models of others in the town hall at Würth and in the Marienburg castle. Different from the *Neckaresel* in having only one funnel, the Bavarian vessels were also equipped half a century before the jet-age with a 'turbine' or jet for propulsion downstream, a most useful device in a river which might contain only two feet of water and was much too shallow for a screw propeller to be used without risk of damage.

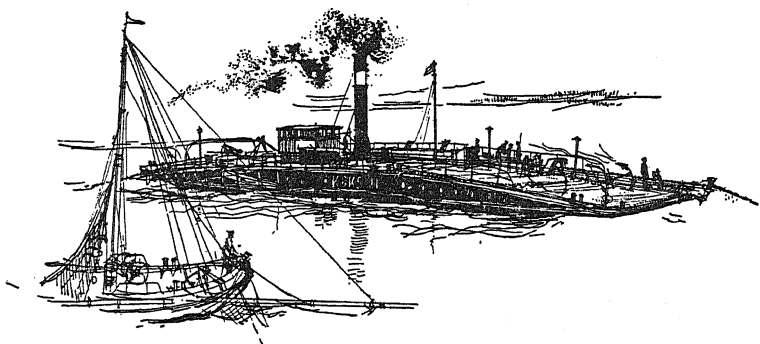
This ingenious affair made haulage simpler than on the Neckar, for there was no need to moor and uncouple an upstream vessel when she encountered a sister-ship coming down river towards her.

Six such ships were originally commissioned, and two more were added later. They were not built on the Main but hundreds of miles away in Dresden, where the plates were drilled and the entire hull bolted together. When complete, the ship was all taken apart again and the numbered plates were railed to Aschaffenburg, where they were reassembled and riveted on a make-shift slipway below the castle and close to the present site of *K.B.K.S.II*. Provided that there was water enough in the river they worked the chain from Aschaffenburg to Bamberg, whereas the stretch from Aschaffenburg to Mainz was operated, until canalization of the lower reaches was completed, by the Hessian chain-ships, two-funnelled craft which used the chain in both directions like their sisters on the Neckar.

In the 1920s the work of building out the entire 250 miles of the Rhine as part of the future Rhine-Main-Danube route began, and the end of the *Kettenschiffe* was in sight. The Hessian vessels had long since vanished, but the proud Bavarian fleet remained. Just as the chain had once grown year by year, to Würzburg, then Kitzingen, Schweinfurt and Bamberg, so now it was to decay from the bottom upwards as the work on the giant locks progressed. Yet the chain did not vanish overnight. Even after the locks were built it was retained for a while, and it lay in a groove down the centre of each pen. At the mitre, where the gates met, there was a little nick into which it fitted, a hole large enough to accommodate the links but too small to cause serious loss of water. The trouble was, of course, that when the chain was dropped over the stern of the *Kettenschiff* it did not necessarily fall into its proper position, and when the gates were closed they were liable to jam on top of it and remain ajar. Grappling irons would then be flung into the lock to fish up the links and lower them exactly into their correct niche, but such a system could not last for long. With the coming of the locks and weirs the chain was obsolete. Soon it was to be lifted, and the smart fleet was disbanded, its expert skippers paid off.

Today nothing remains of the Royal Bavarian Chain Ships but

the two sadly changed hulks lying at their permanent moorings to serve as a restaurant or a store for oil and paint. But their memory is preserved along the river in the warm parlours of many a '*zum Kettenschiff*' and '*zur Kette*', where the masters and pilots of the powerful Rhine motorvessels relax in the late evening over a glass of clear wine from the vineyards of the Main.

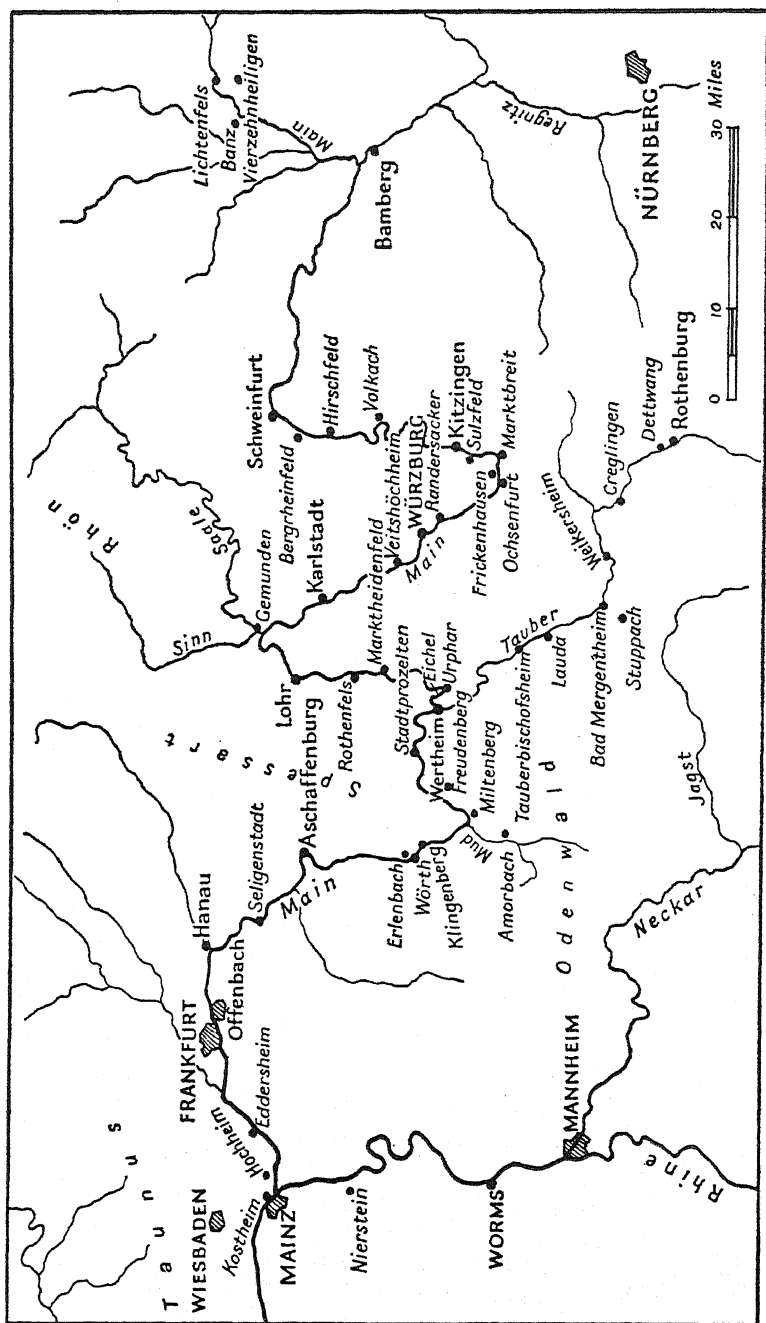


## VII

*A river hymnal — Easter on the Main — Wörth and the guild of shippers — Klingenberg — the Commodore tows a fleet — Miltenberg — the Saalburg of the Romans — Amorbach's royal connection — the Main in flood — the swans of Miltenberg*

*B*lest are the pure in heart . . . the Commodore's exploration of the German rivers was like a voyage through a hymn-book, for every city and county through which we passed had given its name to a tune sung in churches all round the world. *Jesus still lead on* — that was Speyer, and below that city we had turned into the Neckar at Mannheim, or *Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us*. Stuttgart and Württemberg and Swabia had also brought their church melodies in due turn, and now we were heading for Würzburg (*Saviour, quicken many nations*) far upstream in the beautiful land of Franconia, *Blest are the pure in heart*. Had there been any Welshmen aboard they might have sung us all the way up the Bavarian Main.

The River Main is, in fact, decidedly ecclesiastical. In contrast to the rivers of Hessen further north it is heavily weighted towards Roman Catholicism, and in every village the bells are already tolling when the locks open at six in the morning, and they have not necessarily finished by the time the navigation closes at eight in the evening. Indeed we rarely stopped, whether at midday or for the night, without the music of the bells drifting to us over the water. The term 'music' is perhaps rather complimentary, for in no country outside Britain is there anything in the nature of change-ringing, such as rings out from the hamlets of the Thames. The Netherlands have their elegantly tinkling carillons and a few are to be heard in Germany — such as that of the Nikolaikirche in Frankfurt — but the continental system of ringing is to pull the



ropes as hard as may be and let the bells jangle and clang, regardless of tempo, harmony, or anything but making the loudest possible din. The English may be prejudiced in favour of Bob Majors and Grandsires, but it seems a good preference to have and to hold.

The morning after we left Aschaffenburg we awoke as usual to the sound of several churches tolling against each other, and soon we could see on the opposite shore a procession led by red-robed priests and acolytes in surplices, making the circuit of the church of Erlenbach. In every village along the river we were to find that fir-trees had been cut and placed outside the church doors as though it were Christmas. In fact it was Palm Sunday. A few days later we felt that something was amiss when we awoke in the early morning, and soon we realized that the familiar background of the ringing of church bells was mysteriously absent. This was because the day was Maundy Thursday, and if the bells were silent it was simply because they were not there — for every Franconian child knows that early on that morning they fly away to Rome and do not return until Easter Day. We wondered if all the bells flew thither or whether, like the storks of Germany, they divided themselves into two distinct migration routes, the Protestant bells taking a different course. If this were the case they presumably flew to Worms.

The next morning we were curious to see whether in this god-fearing valley the skippers would still ply their ships on the river, or would perhaps observe Good Friday as a holiday. In fact most of them carried on with their calling, but not quite as usual, for we noticed that there were differences in the way the national ensigns were hoisted at the stern. Some ships flew the flag at half-mast, and on learning that this was the custom for Protestant craft we quickly followed suit. The Roman Catholic vessels did not wear an ensign at all on this one day in the year, and they also formed the majority of those which lay at anchor through the day. A few of the ships which still plugged up the stream had their flags hoisted as usual and these, no doubt, were atheists, agnostics and other queer birds.

When we had looked across the water to watch the Palm Sunday

procession filing along the river bank and around the church of Erlenbach, we ourselves were lying at the little town of Wörth on the opposite shore. We had arrived there in the early evening, sweeping past a magnificent hillside clothed in all the finery of the first spring leaves of the forest trees, for now at last we were touching the edge of the Odenwald. Ahead, and on either hand the hills rose to a height of 700 feet above the stream, and it was partly the splendid view up the reach towards Klingenberg that had decided us to stop at Wörth for the night. A short and rather tumbled quayside edged the stream immediately above the ferry, and seated in the evening sun were the old men of the village, most of them obviously retired skippers — for Wörth has for centuries been a village of shipping and is the second largest community of shippers on the Main.

The Second World War spared Wörth itself, but many of its ships were sunk, some in waters as distant as the Gulf of Bothnia. In the years of uneasy peace the fleet was to grow again, and today it consists of perhaps twenty large motor vessels and as many lighters. If they are more conspicuous by their absence than their presence at Wörth itself this is, of course, because they are away on their voyages, but on one day in the year the bank is lined with the craft as they return for their annual festival of thanksgiving and intercession. Back in 1737 the local guild of shippers ordained that this commemoration was to be scrupulously observed, and originally it was very properly ordained for the day of the patron saint of shipmen, St Nicholas of Myra, the original Santa Claus, who on the continent is not sufficiently commercial to come on Christmas Eve but sweeps through the darkness to visit the children's bedsteads on the night before his proper day, December 6th. In earlier times this was, no doubt, a suitable season for the shipmen to gather at Wörth, but today their voyages take them further and the sheer competition in shipping has made it necessary to bring the annual gathering closer to the Christmas season. It is now on the Monday following the festival of the Three Kings (Twelfth Night) that the shipmen of Wörth hold their service in the church of St Nicholas, and it is on that day alone that the same chorale comes echoing from the nave, a chorale for shippers only.



*Nach dem Sturme fahren wir  
sicher durch die Wellen;  
lassen grosser Schöpfer Dir  
unser Lob erschallen.*

When the tempest's roar is done,  
Safe the waves we plough.  
Let our voices, mighty One,  
Sing they praises now.

The guild of shipmen of Wörth had its very necessary articles for ensuring decorous behaviour, and if one of its members swore at another or called him by unpleasant names he had to pay a fine. But like the guilds of the Neckar, it was primarily concerned with proper fair shares for all, and it operated the same system of the *Rang* (or *Beurt*, as the men of the Neckar termed it), each shipper being obliged to take his turn for a cargo. In fact the Main and Neckar were in severe competition, particularly during the nineteenth century, for either river offered a route by which goods could be brought up from the Low Countries and the Rhineland to points from which pack trains could carry them across to Austria. On either stream the system of shipping was very much the same, but each had particular features of its own.

The *Halfreiter* of the Neckar went by the more usual name of *Leinreiter* (tow-riders) on the Main, and here they worked in smaller companies. Though shallow in many places, the Main lacked the particularly swift passages which made the convoy system necessary on the Neckar, and the Main shipper would normally have only a single large ship of up to 200 tons, with a smaller *Schelch* of about one-quarter the capacity hanging behind it. Even in seasons of strong flow, up to six horses could pull this load easily enough.

As on the Neckar, horse-towage was the rule, and it remained virtually unaltered for centuries, but in the 1840s the tow-riders saw with alarm the introduction of the first steam tug on the river. Yet their terrible opponent was only to have a short period of ascendancy, for the continual shoaling of the river-bed made its use impossible except during times of moderate flood, and soon it steamed out of the Main never to return.

The next and more dangerous enemy not only of the *Leinreiter* but of the shippers themselves was the railway, which took so much traffic from the river that within fifteen years it was almost halved. Rail transport was no better in the case of the stone and wood which formed the bulk of the goods shipped down the Main, but the railway did not suffer from the depredations of customs posts. The Main flowed, often as a watery frontier-line, past so many petty dukedoms that in 1790 a ship running from Kitzingen to Mainz passed through no less than twenty-five customs posts — an average of one in every seven miles — and in spite of efforts to get these costly obstructions removed there were still six rounds of duty to be paid downstream of Wertheim when the trains began to puff along their bankside track.

The arrival of the first of the 'Main-Cows', as the chain ships were popularly called on account of the mooing of their whistles, brought the end of the *Leinreiter* in sight, but certainly saved the shipping. In 1886 the chain was laid to Aschaffenburg, six years later to Miltenberg, upstream of Wörth, and finally step by step to Bamberg. With the gradual canalization of the river the chain-ships yielded to orthodox steam-tugs, and these in turn have now been replaced by diesels, whilst many ships have also been converted to move under their own power. Whether or not the diesel tugs have a secure future ahead of them is uncertain, for other forms of craft, such as the great pushers *Gaston Haelling* and *Wasserbüffel* of the Rhine, or the 700 foot flexible 'snake-ship' of the Mittelland canal might one day unexpectedly produce offspring of a humbler kind which could swim effectively in the more restricted waters of the Main.

Before it was regulated, the Main was particularly liable to floods during the winter, and if the track for the drovers' horses were under water the towage had to stop and the shippers stayed at home. Another hazard of the early spring was ice, for the higher reaches of the Main would often freeze and the thaw-water of the snows would accumulate behind a barrier of ice floes until with a roar the obstruction collapsed and the flood would sweep down the valley, driving with it a pack of formidable blocks of ice. Even now the same thing may happen on the Rhine, and it is for this reason

that the refuge harbours have been built, huge basins into which as many as one hundred 1000-ton ships can be packed whilst the ice drives past outside.

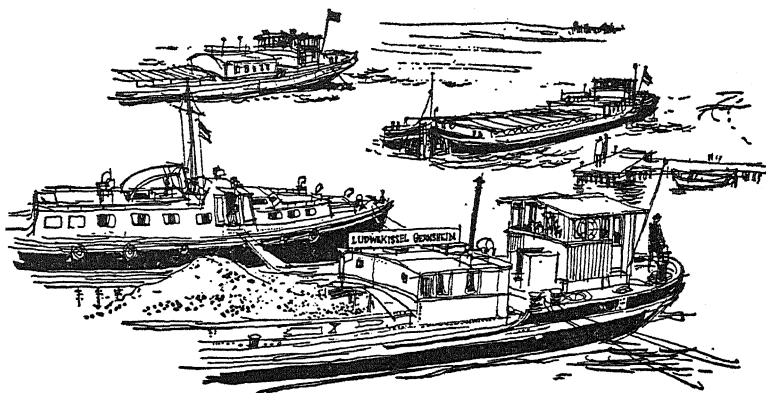
Ice and flood could cause great loss to the shippers, for navigation might be suspended for weeks on end — in 1895 the two combined to make the river impassable for 106 days — but the men of Wörth were accustomed to these difficulties and during the winter they would often stay at home for weeks or months, lumbering and working on the land, or fishing. But their reach of river provided no protection against ice for the craft moored there during the winter season, and eventually the members of the guild subscribed the necessary sum to cut a refuge-harbour of their own on the edge of the town. Even today a few of the smaller vessels may be taken there for safety if a severe frost is followed by serious flooding, but otherwise it is used mainly by moorhens and ducks, or the town geese.

That the Main would often rise dangerously high can be seen by a glance at any of the villages along its shores, particularly those which have no broad expanse of flat farmland over which the pent-up waters could expand. Flood marks are common, cut on the porches of churches or inns and houses, and the town walls which flank the river served to protect the inhabitants from the rising water as much as from the marauding bands of hostile dukedoms or the forces of Gustavus Adolphus. Wörth itself originally lay between the high road and the river, and in the flood of 1883 much of the town was so deep in water that for three weeks the inhabitants had to live upstairs, coming and going by boats which they boarded from the windows of their upper storeys. It was this exceptional flood which led to a change in the structure of the town, for the new houses were in future built on higher ground beyond the road.

The canalization of the Main was expected to do away with the floods, for there were eventually to be nearly forty weirs between Mainz and Bamberg, each of which could regulate the flow in its own section and thus smooth out the sudden surges of flood-water from the melting snow far up in the Bavarian hills. And indeed the floods are not quite as menacing as once they were, but that is not to say that they may not be serious. Several of the higher flood-

marks to be seen along the Main relate to the last twenty years, and at Wörth the mayor's father, who was among the older men seated by the quay in the evening sunshine when the *Commodore* arrived there, pointed out to us the window on the town-hall through which a bride and bridegroom had been ferried in a boat only a few years before, so that their wedding ceremony could be duly performed. In that same flood he himself had nearly suffered a tragic loss, for in his cellar there stood a fine barrel of apple wine which he had carefully prepared for the winter. When the water rose and flooded the streets nearest the river, the wooden trap door of his cellar opened itself and the precious cask bobbed up to be swept away by the swirling torrent. Most fortunately it was driven by the current across the garden of a small holder, and there it was held up by the wire-netting of the chicken-run, so he had been able to row down in a boat and tow the barrel back to safety.

Among those who came to see the *Commodore* as she lay beside the great stacks of pit-props which the ships of Wörth would carry down to the mines of the Ruhr was the town clerk, and although it was already late he offered to run home for his keys and take us into the town hall, which lay at the side of the alley running down to the ferry. A most attractive little building capped with a tiny clock-tower, it was swathed right down to the foot of the first floor in neat slates chipped on a curve, and if we wondered why the front door merely led into a dark and cool ground floor lobby, paved with stone but quite deserted, we soon understood the reason. On the walls inside were marked the levels of a number of floods, and only upstairs could municipal affairs be safe from the river which, though the main source of work and riches for the townspeople, was still a formidable enemy whose attacks were unpredictable. Up the great staircase we were shown the magnificent council chamber with the seats of the councillors set round the wall. Here were the chests of the guilds of fishermen and shippers, the arms of the members, and the fine models of ships of earlier days — including a Royal Bavarian Chain Ship. Not much had changed in the last three and a half centuries, and this was appropriate enough, for Wörth itself had not greatly altered. The modern steel vessels of the ship-masters, the *Gottvertrauen* and



*Zufriedenheit*, the *St Nikolaus* and the *Minna Maria*, might be larger than their fore-runners, but they would often carry the same cargoes of stone and timber down to the Rhine valley, starting the day with a ring of the bell *in Gottes Namen*, as if in answer to the tolling of the church of St Nicholas, followed by a brief moment of silent prayer with the crew standing cap in hand on deck. Unless, of course, they happened to be of the brand who five days later would keep their flag fluttering at the staff throughout Good Friday — a thing in earlier times unthinkable.

If, until the end of the nineteenth century, the ships of Wörth had remained almost unaltered over four hundred years, this was because the river itself and the method of towage had never varied. The *Rang* ships were wooden craft, built from the stout oak of the Odenwald and Spessart forests, often of the same size as their sixteenth-century predecessors and built at one of the two shipyards on the bank at Wörth itself. It was the canalization and the coming of steel hulls which changed the form of the vessels, and the Schellenberger shipyard was to become an important builder of steel vessels, not just for the Main but for elsewhere. Outgrowing its site beside the ferry it moved to the Erlenbach shore, and when we sat on deck in the fading light of evening we were surprised to see that the sleek, sturdy vessel lying in the river for fitting out had the name *Bold Knight* painted on her stern, and that her port of registration was London. This fine ship was soon to leave on her maiden voyage down river, and before long she

would be moving up the muddy reaches of the Thames estuary to her future home at Stratford, where she would go into service beside her sister-ship the *Black Knight* which had also been built at the same Bavarian wharf. Oil carriers for India were also under construction, and had the next day not been a Sunday we should have been wakened by the rattle of the riveters' mechanical hammers.

The craft built at Erlenbach could be of surprising dimensions, for the yard would sometimes lay the keel of the largest possible ship which could pass down to the Rhine. The limiting factors were the draught unladen, which could not safely exceed seven and a half feet, and the beam of almost forty feet which the locks allowed. There were of course bridges, but in the case of sea-going vessels the entire superstructure would be completed and then removed and lowered to pontoons or set across a barge, to be hoisted aboard again at another yard after the last of the Main bridges had been left astern.

On one occasion all these factors were duly thought of, and a ship was built which would fill the locks from side to side, leaving only four inches on either flank so that boards could be hung down to keep her off the walls on her descent towards Mainz. The dimensions were carefully checked against all the measurements in the office of the chief water-rat of Würzburg, but by a curious oversight one very important fact was overlooked. It so happened that one of the locks below Aschaffenburg was not straight, but built on a curve, whereas over a considerable length the straight-sided vessel had what was assumed to be the greatest practicable beam. Had room not been left for plank-fenders, the marine draughtsman at the yard told us, the ship would have been obliged to stay on the upper Main as a very expensive white elephant, but with the planks removed she could just be squeezed in between the slightly curving walls. Two inches more of beam, and she would never have reached the Rhine and the sea.

If St Nicholas is traditionally honoured and respected at Wörth he now has a friendly rival in the figure of St Martin of Tours. The festival of St Martin has for long been the highlight of the year in Düsseldorf, and when during the Second World War many

of the people driven from the ruins of that city came to settle in Wörth they brought the custom with them. The saint now makes his annual ride of the town of Santa Claus, accompanied by a beggar clad in half of the young Roman officer's cloak and followed by all the children of the town. 'St Martin, St Martin, he rode through snow and wind,' they chant as they surge behind him, lighting the streets of the old town with the flicker of their torches and paper lanterns. And ahead, as is most proper for the procession in honour of a military man, the town band marches with drums and brass, later to gather in the *zum Anker* and *zum Schiff* to drink a glass of the fine red wine of Klingenberg.

Red wine is not a common product in Germany, but the *Klingenberger Roter* is famous. Not without reason is it included in the traditional list of the three best wines of the land — a catalogue which notably makes no mention of any vineyard of the Moselle.

*Würzburg am Stein,  
Klingenberg am Main,  
Bacharach am Rhein,  
Da wächst der beste Wein.*

The Stein at Würzburg is not a river but a hillside, and it was from the Stein that came the only wine considered by the Board of Green Cloth, or whoever it is that makes these momentous judgments, to be superlative enough to grace the royal table at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Or so they confidently say in Würzburg.

There can be few more magnificent pieces of river anywhere in the world than the seventy miles from Wörth to Gemünden. All the way we were to have either the Spessart forest on the port side or the Odenwald to starboard and for much of the distance both together. Only seventeen minutes upstream of Wörth at the *Commodore's* sedate knottage, Klingenberg is the first of the river villages of the woodland reaches, and like so many of the Main settlements it is one of those places which is pretty and yet has no buildings of fame or great distinction. It nestles by the river much as it has done for centuries, enjoying the peace which was occasionally rudely shattered by the Swedes or the French, or the Peasants'

Revolt. It has half-timbered houses of great charm hidden away in little alleys, a solid square town gateway topped with a belfry of neatly cut slates, and cobbled streets over which rumble the ox-drawn wains and manure-barrel carts. It is one of those villages one can delight in whole-heartedly, without quite knowing why.

Passing through the lock we doubled back to the top of the weir and pulled in at the village itself which lay at the foot of the piled terraces of pink soil, the home for a thousand years of the rich ruby wine. Against our own doubts the lock-keeper assured us that we could indeed draw close in to the shore, and that the water level could not conceivably vary during the course of the day. If we threw lines round a couple of willows we could leave the ship without anxiety and climb up the path to the ruin of Clingenburg at the top of the vineyards, peeping out from beneath the forest cap of the hill. On its terrace we could again sample the wine from the Spätburgunder vines below us, and look down over the roof-tops and across the blossom of pear and apple to the river, blue in the spring sunlight.

*Und nicht vergessen sei vom Main  
Der Klingenberger Rote.  
Dran könnte man — O süsse Pein —  
Sich trinken gar zu Tode.*

But instead of drinking ourselves to death in sweet pain we continued to the top of the ridge, up to the tower set on top of what is said to have been a hill camp of the Germani. Probably it was so, for where the forest levelled off towards the summit there were traces of earthworks which certainly were not built by the Romans, for in this area their frontier was the natural barrier of the Main itself.

It was when looking out from the top of the watch tower that we had the curious impression that the *Commodore*, far below us and beyond the edge of the village, was lying very slightly atilt, and when in the late afternoon we returned to her, we found we were not mistaken. In spite of the lock-keeper's assurances the river had dropped nearly eighteen inches during our absence, probably because the sluices of the hydro-electric plant had been opened.



Instead of resting in the shallows she was relaxing comfortably on the gently sloping stone wall which ran out evenly at the foot of the bank. Though not in the slightest danger — for she was resting along the full length of her stout and shallow keel — she was very firmly settled, and several more inches than usual of the russet anti-fouling paint on her bottom were exposed to the public gaze.

There seemed little doubt that we should have to wait until the power station closed down or a violent cloudburst a hundred miles further upstream swelled the flow of the Main, but by very good fortune the Tauber canoe club happened to have arrived, its members having paddled down from Wertheim in a fourteen-seater Canadian canoe and an armada of fold-boats. At once they ran to our assistance and some of them waded down the slope to heave on the side. A dozen others took our two poles and pushed with all their strength at the bow and stern whilst we ourselves hung on to the rails on the outer side and leaned out over the water. To the rhythmic cry of their instructor the *Commodore* began to lean and lurch back again, rolling and rocking in an ever-increasing swing until she leaned over far enough to lift her bottom clear and slip gracefully out into the deeper water.

If the canoe club members had been of such assistance to her, she was now only too glad to be of service to them, for there lay ahead of them a long and hard paddle against the stream. However keen a canoeist one may be there is nothing more pleasant than to be hauled upstream in effortless ease by a motor vessel, so the flotilla was soon assembled, strung out in a long sinuous line. When we set off towards Miltenberg we had trailing astern of us more than a hundred yards of convoy of little ships, their paddlers basking in the evening sun and singing happy Franconian songs of hills and valleys, and probably of lady-loves and cool stone jugs of wine. At Kleinheubach they loosed their lines, cast off our tow-rope, and at a signal from their warrant-officer instructor the company gave three well-trained and hearty cheers, with paddles presented vertically in smart salute. Then they paddled across to the shore whilst we went ahead to the foot of the lock, which was already closed for the night. Next morning we moved up another mile to draw in at the small loading basin at Miltenberg.

Many towns have the habit of styling themselves the pearl of their area, but Miltenberg's claim to be the '*Perle am Untermain*' cannot be disputed. Undoubtedly it must be one of the prettiest villages in Germany, and the group of timbered houses clustered around the delicate sandstone fountain in the market place attracts artists from far and wide. Rising step by step up the slope towards the old gateway at the top of the Schnatterloch, there is not a single building large or small which is not a real gem of individual design. Fortunately this splendid town centre, together with the narrow high street leading out of it, was spared from damage during the war, even if the castle of Mildenburg peeping out of the trees immediately above can show the holes made by American artillery side by side with those inflicted by the guns of Gustavus Adolphus.

The Mildenburg may well be on the site of a Roman fort. Certainly it was here that the great defensive rampart of the *Limes* ran down to the river, emerging again downstream of Aschaffenburg to run across the Taunus hills. We had already explored a short section of the Roman frontier on foot from the Neckar, and on our way up through Frankfurt the Main had taken us near enough to the Saalburg for a visit to be possible. There we had seen the *Limes* fortifications in all their original strength.

The Hohenzollern Kaisers have left their mark in many places by the erection of gigantic and heavy monuments — the Porta Westfalica, the Hermannsdenkmal and the vast and hideous pile at the junction of Rhine and Moselle, to mention only a few — but now and again they had the habit of restoring some ancient ruin to its original state. The *Commodore* had earlier carried us to see the medieval Haut Koenigsbourg in Alsace, rebuilt in impregnable style by Wilhelm II, but the Saalburg was even more impressive. Out in the wilds of the Taunus forest this remarkable camp is very well worth seeing, and one cannot help being grateful to the Kaiser for devoting so much of his own time and the money of others to its reconstruction. Behind the ditch and palisade lies a vast battlemented rectangle, with its four entrance gates, its stores and administrative offices, its *principia* and guardrooms and halls all complete and rebuilt according to the best of archaeological knowledge, and there can be little doubt that the Saalburg is

almost exactly as it was at the beginning of the third century, immediately before its final destruction by the barbarian hordes. Perhaps there was no picture-postcard stall there in the days of the Roman Emperors, but no doubt the officers of the 2nd Rhaetian Cohort sometimes sat at ease in their centrally-heated quarters writing 'Greetings from Saalburg' to their families back home. And that it could be comfortable in their quarters is certain enough, for in modern times the Saalburg's hypocaust system has been fired experimentally with charcoal and found to be most efficient.

Our excursion from Miltenberg was not to the *Limes* but across the hills to Amorbach. A walk of two hours led us up through the oaks and beeches to the layer of the pines, and we followed a track through a forest abounding in deer to skirt the height of the Geisbuckel and drop down into the meadows which fell towards the pretty valley of the Mud. Below us lay another of the beautiful little towns of the Odenwald, its steeply gabled roof-tops dominated by the great rococo church of St Gangolf and the even greater and still more rococo Protestant church of what was once the Benedictine abbey and is now the residence of the Leiningen family.

Amorbach has a curious and unexpected connection with Britain. In 1803 the Count of Leiningen, whose properties in the Palatinate had been ravaged by the forces of Napoleon, was awarded in compensation new territories between the Main and Neckar. He chose the beautiful town of Amorbach to be his residence, but shortly afterwards he died. So did his son, whose widow—Victoria Mary Louisa of Saxe-Saalfeld-Coburg—married a second time and took as her husband the Duke of Kent. Having a young family she had no wish to exchange her home in the idyllic valley of the Mud for the fogs of London, and the Duke of Kent was prevailed upon to transfer himself to the residence in the Odenwald instead. No doubt the possibility of endless hunting was put forward to him as an inducement.

In 1819 the duchess was expecting a baby, and very prudently she travelled to England in order that the child should be born in Britain. The move was a wise one, for when the little girl's father died within a year of her birth she was left with a future ahead of

her and was to ascend the throne as Queen Victoria. If the Queen was never to see for herself the Odenwald town in which she had so nearly been born, she retained a deep affection for her step-brother, Karl von Leiningen, and she broke all the rules by making him a Knight of the Garter. She also endeavoured to persuade his son, 'my dear Earnest' or Ernst von Leiningen, to accept the vacant throne of Greece; but he very sensibly preferred to remain at Amorbach.

It was not Amorbach's just claim that Queen Victoria was nearly born there which had led us to walk over the hills, but the prospect of a recital on the largest and finest baroque organ in the world, a magnificent instrument of more than 3000 pipes, set in a white and gold gallery of the abbey church. Very much to our surprise we found the nave packed with visitors who had come to hear the rich and unusual tones of the instrument. Naturally enough the concert began and ended with preludes and fugues of Bach, but we were also treated to such curiosities as a concerto for bass voice, solo violin and organ continuo, and to a Buxtehude cantata for bass voice, continuo, and two violins. Above the pipes two golden-winged angels perched confidently to blow their gilded trumpets, whilst from the ceiling above them St Benedict looked down benevolently upon the kneeling figure of King Totila of the Goths, with Moses and St Martin of Tours watching him from the rocks on either hand. Amorbach is certainly one of the greatest glories of rococo to be found, and however much the term may be associated with frivolity and over-decoration one cannot help being stirred by the exuberant riot of colour and line. And quite apart from the gaiety of the ceiling and cornices, there is something inviting about the way the little cherubs perch and squat on the sculptures wherever there is room enough to stand on one foot or to sit without squashing the gilded shafts of sunshine or the sugar-icing scrollery.

Travelling step by step up the Main we realized how unfortunate Maxwell and Farson had been to make the voyage behind a chain-ship, for these vessels never stopped except to drop or make fast a barge, and both of them travelled right up to Bamberg without a chance to visit any of the beautiful places through which

they passed. Perhaps they did not mind, for in both cases they were bound for the Black Sea and they had little time to spare. We, however, had all the time in the world to stop wherever we chose, and Miltenberg was too inviting a place for us to chug doggedly past it.

The chain-ships, and before them the *Leinreiter*, had often hauled barges to Miltenberg, for much of what little cargo was carried upstream was unloaded at the basin to the wagons which would carry it to destinations in the Bauland. Few ships draw in there nowadays, and as the quayside was usually deserted the *Commodore* was a very natural object of curiosity. From the farmstead across the road an elderly jovial man came to talk with us, and he told us how, only a few years before, he had walked home in the late evening through water which lapped over the road and reached to his ankles. Retiring to bed, it was an hour or more before he heard a gurgling down below, and on going to the top of the stairs found that the bottom seven steps were already under water. For several days no one could leave the house, but the tradesmen obligingly brought the daily provisions round to the back door in punts and rowboats to hand them in through the windows. One night he heard a terrified howling from the river, and at once he and some others rowed out to find a dog which had been washed down from Freudenberg, still chained to the kennel upon the roof of which it was sitting as the flood drove it down the Main. The creature was rescued, and later returned to its home village when communications were restored.

Then came a great freeze, and cars were driving over the stream on the frozen surface until a quick overnight thaw started a break-up of the ice all the way down the valley. Driven by the flood, the floes struck against the banks in the narrowing bend by the Hotel Rosen, and piled upon each other until they reached the height of the eaves. Then at last the mass began to break again, the blocks sliding and grinding against each other as they sped down to the weir where they again accumulated until from time to time the top-heavy pile would tip over the top of the sluices and crash into the reach below with a rending thunder which could be heard for miles up the valley.

On a more peaceful occasion there arrived upon the reach by the harbour a pair of wild swans. Apart from a few which are prepared to sit out the oil of the lower river at Frankfurt in order to solicit food from the steamer passengers, swans are something of a rarity on the Main, which is more a river of herons and birds of prey, so when the two settled on the water in their town the good people of Miltenberg at once decided to do everything possible to persuade them to stay. Food was thrown to them, and a desirable detached residence was quickly built, a floating house thatched with reeds and even having glazed windows so that the swans could peep out to watch the ships go by. As an extra hint an iron swan was forged by the blacksmith and set upon the ridge of the roof, and then the house was towed out and moored in the stream — where it still lay, not far from the *Commodore's* berth. The swans appreciated all that was done for them and they graciously agreed to reside permanently in Miltenberg, where there was not only free housing but an abundance of tit-bits to be had from admirers among the townspeople, from the week-end visitors, and from the crews of passing vessels who kept the scraps for them. Everything went splendidly until the winter, when the town of Miltenberg became very concerned that the swans might be feeling the cold, and that even in their handsome house they would be too exposed to wind and rain to be as happy as swans should be. It was resolved that they should be taken up and put in a farm-yard for safety.

It is one thing to decide to move swans but quite another to carry out the decision. The Main had no expert teams of swan-uppers such as the Vintners' and Dyers' Companies of the City of London might have, and the birds proved very expert at eluding those who rowed out to them, tossed them some enticing food, and then leaned out to try to grab them. At last some ingenious person had the idea of making them intoxicated so that they could be taken when drunk and incapable, and an expedition rowed out to throw them some pieces of bread soaked in *Schnaps*. The swans picked up the pieces, and carefully keeping out of reach of the boats they swished the morsels to and fro in the water until all the liquor had been washed out. Then they swallowed them, and came back in complete sobriety to ask for more.

But the moorhens were either less prudent or less fastidious. As soon as word was passed round the reed-beds that bread and *Schnaps* were to be had for the asking, the waterhens came scooting over the stream and gobbled up as much as they could find. Soon the friends of the swans were busily engaged in rowing to pick up one intoxicated moorhen after another as the imprudent birds stotted and rolled upon the water in imminent danger of drowning. They were carried to safety and kept ashore until they could walk straight and without falling over, and then they were released again. Whether they were sadder and wiser birds thereafter our informant did not know; but as for the swans, they were never captured at all. Without the least concern they sat out the winter on the Main and resisted every effort to entice them ashore.

## VIII

*Wertheim — Lioba of Wimborn — the Tauber valley —  
carvings of Riemenschneider — risings of the peasants —  
Urpfar and the Wettenburg — Rothenfels — memorial  
stones — the mast of the Kinderglück — the Commodore  
reaches Gemünden*

A part from the addition of the locks and weirs, the Main from Miltenberg to Wertheim cannot greatly have changed since Albrecht Dürer sailed down the river on the first stage of his journey to the Netherlands. Wine-ships no longer ply upon the stream, but the villages clustered tightly along the shore are much as they have been for centuries. Standing a respectful twenty yards or more from the water's edge they do not spread far up the slope behind, for there the rich stony soil begins which is more profitably used for vineyards. Even among the houses there are vines, larger and more domesticated ones which climb up above the arched doorways in the narrow village streets, squeezing back tightly against the beams to avoid being brushed off by the swaying load of a passing ox-cart, and from upper windows the bright scarlet quilts of down, freshening in the morning sunshine, hang out over the sills to meet them.

Between the village and the water the geese which will furnish the stuffing for still more quilts, as well as a hearty meal at the festival of *Kirchweih*, grub along the rough bank under the watchful eyes of the small children who begin their life of serious responsibility as goose-girls and goose-boys, as though the days of fairy tales were by no means over. High on the hillside there may be a convent, a chapel of pilgrimage to commemorate the strange vision of some cow-herd or vineyard worker of long ago, or perhaps the ruin of a sturdy castle built of the rosy stone which here and there breaks out into sheer cliffs from which the hawks dart out to sweep

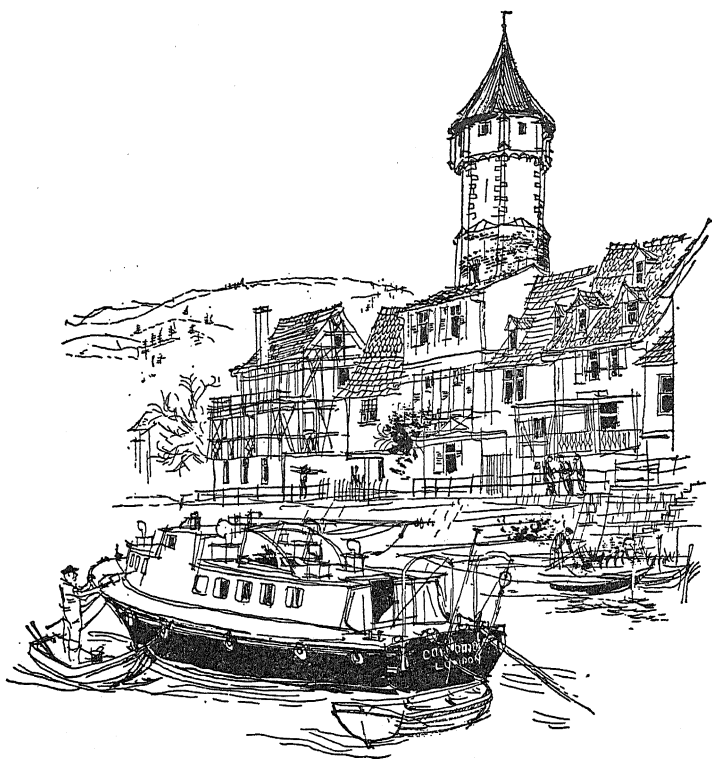


over the valley before gliding back to their lairs upon the ledges. On the less sunny slopes the village fruit orchards are a sea of white blossom, and up above them the dark coat of pines is sprinkled with the lighter green of larch in bud, and the exuberant bursting of wild cherry blossom. The Main is a river of great beauty, and no stretch of its course is lovelier than that where Odenwald and Spessart face each other across the valley.

Even today, many of the little towns have hardly spread beyond the confines of the medieval walls breached by the marauding armies and painfully repaired after each fresh invasion. Each is a place of shippers and fishermen, and as far away as Rotterdam and Bremen one may see the names of Freudenberg and Stadtprozelten on barges lying to load alongside a ship of the ocean, and at those same villages other ships from other lands may lie offshore whilst the dinghy is rowed to the bank to pick up a pilot for the journey upstream to Würzburg. Not that a pilot was necessary for the *Commodore*, but then she was not carrying a thousand tons of petrol.

The approach to Wertheim is splendid, for no place on the Main has a finer situation. From the south the River Tauber flows in through a deep valley famous for the beauty of its townships — Tauberbischofsheim, Mergentheim, Weikersheim, and the city of Rothenburg famous the world over as one of the three splendid medieval fortified communities of central Europe still to survive undestroyed by war, fire, private enterprise or town planning committee, within their tall encircling walls. The Main and Tauber each wash one side of the older part of Wertheim, and behind the town stands the castle of the counts, strangely reminiscent of Heidelberg.

Two weeks had passed since the *Commodore* left Amöneburg on her spring voyage, and the time had come for us to place her in safe hands until July, when we were to return and follow the Main upstream. Wertheim seemed the most possible place to lay her up, and so we left the other ships to swing round the long curve of the Main to port whilst we headed her cautiously into the Tauber itself and past a rather tumble-down wharf to where a derelict steamer lay rotting sadly at her moorings. On the town side of the



stream a row of fishermen's houses was packed along the water's edge, reaching as far ahead as the Tauber bridge. Sounding carefully we found that the river became fleet and shoaled at the approach to the bridge, but that down by the eel-boats of the fishermen there was water enough. A smart white passenger vessel was lying at a jetty, the *Stadt Wertheim*, and drawing alongside her we consulted her captain, Werner Herz.

Kapitän Herz was not an old salt, but an energetic and younger man whose ship was his obvious pride. There was not a scratch upon her paint, and the decks and seats were spotlessly clean. We could see at once that he was an enthusiast for the water, and he was delighted that the *Commodore* should have come all the way from London to share the delights of the Main which he loved. When we asked him where she might lie up and perhaps receive a coat of paint above the waist line, he said we need have no worries

at all. We should not risk placing her alongside the derelict steamer, for such a decayed ship could easily infect a neighbour with rot — and, besides, there was always the chance that naughty boys would climb aboard. The *Commodore* would be best left hanging in the flow of the Tauber just below his own jetty, he said. There we would find a good muddy bottom to hold her anchor, and she would be inaccessible from the bank and in full view of his windows. He would regard it as a real pleasure to see that she was safe and sound, to watch her water-line and to pump her out if need be, to find a really competent master painter to deck her out in the right variety of paint, and generally to see that she was waited on hand and foot. He insisted that we need do no more than drop the anchors fore and aft, pack our bags and return to England whenever we wished. For the *Commodore's* safety we need not give a moment's thought.

And so we left her. During the next two months we heard nothing from Kapitän Herz, but an old fisherman of the same name (a very common one in Wertheim), sent us a newspaper photograph of the *Commodore*, and Herr Vollhardt, the bookseller and musician with whom we had struck an acquaintance before we left, also wrote and told us that he saw her every morning as he crossed the bridge on his way to the shop, and that she seemed to be just as we had left her. We had a further letter from yet another person who lived nearby, just to reassure us, and it was not difficult to see that she had become quite an object of interest and affection to the kindly people of Wertheim. When we at last returned there we were greeted by the baker and the milkman and a dozen others as though we were long lost friends who had found our way home after years of absence in the dark jungles of London.

We knew that we should not find the captain of the *Stadt Wertheim* at home, for out of the bus we had already seen his ship, gleaming white, speeding down the river towards Miltenberg, but as we bumped along the road on the opposite side of the valley we could see for a moment into the Tauber mouth. The *Commodore* was basking in the sun, sparkling in her new summer dress, and when at last we arrived at the river bank we saw that she had been most carefully tended in every way. No wicked boys had flung

stones in an effort to break her armourplate windows, and as Wertheim was not a haunt of seagulls we did not climb up to a deck richly spread with organic fertilizer.

Frau Herz was at home, and she very quickly forestalled the inquiry we were about to make by telling us that her husband had been proud to have the *Commodore* entrusted to him. If he had watched over her, looked to the moorings, struck a bargain for us with a good craftsman painter and seen to it that everything was ready for us, what of that? Would we not have done the same? Nothing would induce him to accept any payment for his help. He was now away for three days to run trips from Miltenberg, and perhaps we would see him later in the summer on our way downstream. Then the *Commodore* and the *Stadt Wertheim* could exchange courtesies once more.

The valley of the Tauber is less grand than that of the Main, but equally ecclesiastical. Only a few miles up its winding course from Wertheim lies the abbey of Bronnbach, resettled in the 1920s by refugee monks from Slavonia, but originally founded by Bernhard of Clairvaux when he made his way through the valley on one of his journeys of pilgrimage and preaching. A little further up comes Tauberbischofsheim, one of the oldest monastic foundations in Germany, and one which has a particular link with Britain, for it was founded and built by a band of missionaries and craftsmen who came over from England in the eighth century.

Boniface, himself a Wessex man, was engaged in his mission to the German tribes when he received a remarkable letter from a young girl of noble birth to whom he was distantly related, and who described herself in her letter as 'the most lowly of all the servants who bear the yoke of Christ'. Her father had died some years before, and her mother was now morose and ageing. 'I am the only child of my parents,' she wrote, 'and my whole wish is this — though I know that I am not worthy of it — that I may look upon you as my brother; for I have no one whom I may trust so fully as I do you.' Out of his friendship for her father the girl asked Boniface to remember her continually in his prayers, and she enclosed a small personal present for him so that he might be reminded always that he was now indeed her elder brother. She ended by

apologizing for the clumsy and inexperienced style of her letter, and added a few lines of verse which she had composed for him in Latin.

This girlish letter was to be the beginning of the consolidation and expansion of the work which Boniface was accomplishing in central Europe in the face of many setbacks. The remarkable girl who had written to him, and to whom he later gave the nickname of Lioba (*Liebe*, or love) entered the double Benedictine foundation at Wimborne in Dorset, and it was many years later that her chosen 'elder brother' wrote to call her to found a community in the valley of the Tauber. He was then sixty, and she was only thirty, but soon she was to be held in deep affection by the people of the beautiful Taubertal. At Tauberbischofsheim she established the Benedictine abbey from which the arts of farming and fruit-growing spread up and down the valley to transform the standard of living of its people.

Lioba's lovable personality was to leave a permanent mark upon the Tauber valley and on the other communities which she founded, and to which she called more helpers from England. Charlemagne himself held her in the greatest esteem, and his young queen Hildegard was so devoted to her that Lioba had the greatest difficulty in resisting her entreaties that she would stay with the queen at court. Her whole heart was in her work in the vale of the Tauber, and finally she had to take her leave of Hildegard, embracing her lovingly but telling her firmly that never again could they meet.

To Boniface, Lioba was such a continual and happy inspiration that he referred to her as 'the comfort of his pilgrimage', and when at the age of eighty he was preparing to face his fatal encounter with the Frisians he asked her to visit him at Mainz. There he gave her his cloak as a mark of the affection which had sustained him throughout half his long life, and he charged his bishops that when she should die she would be buried beside him in the great abbey of Fulda, as indeed she was — just as the sister of Benedict was buried at the side of her brother.

It was in the church of Tauberbischofsheim that one of Grünewald's most famous altar paintings was to be seen during two

periods of its existence, but at the end of the last century it was acquired by the Karlsruhe gallery and sawn apart to form the two chief treasures among the exhibits as the *Crucifixion* and the *Scourging*. Whether or not Grünewald painted his double-sided masterpiece for the abbey of Lioba is a matter of debate among historians, but there is less doubt that his *Madonna in the Garden* was part of the Maria Schnee altar of Aschaffenburg, where its original frame is still to be seen. Eventually it found its way to the church of Mergentheim in the Tauber valley, and when in 1809 the priest of the nearby village of Stuppach bought it for his own church with the help of his friends, he had little idea what it was that he had purchased. Through the centuries the Madonna had been painted over, improved, forgotten, rediscovered, altered and italianized to such an extent that it was not until its restoration in the 1920s that the painting of Grünewald came to light in all its splendour with the selfsame Franconian peasant-girl Mary who is to be seen in the Isenheim altar at Colmar.

It is not with Grünewald, however, that the Tauber is so inseparably associated as with his contemporary, the mayor of Würzburg who was imprisoned and tortured for taking the part of the peasants in their ill-fated revolt against the lords and bishops who oppressed them, the same rising in which Götz von Berlichingen was to play his short and famous part. If we ourselves knew little of the burgomaster of Würzburg our interest was to be aroused in a most unexpected way. Twenty-seven years earlier, when a student at Freiburg, I had happened to see in a shop in that city a pair of photographs of wood-carvings which appealed to me so much that I bought them. I had never purchased any other such pictures before or since, but these particular carvings so attracted me in their extraordinary portrayal of character that the two photographs were to hang on my wall ever after — in Lancashire, then in Cambridge, and later in Highgate. The one showed a broad-faced, jovial but earnest man, somewhat bald, who was holding a book from which he was looking upwards as though seeking to understand what it was that he was reading. The other was of a pair of figures, one of them with his arm round the shoulder of the other, who seemed to be blind but who was holding the book of

which his companion was turning the pages. Both carvings had something indescribably wistful about them, and in the lines of the faces ringed by the scrolls of curling hair there was the most astonishing portrayal of character, so that I seemed to know intimately the men themselves. Whether or not I ever actually heard the name of the master carver who had fashioned them, or where the figures themselves were to be found, I cannot say, but if so, such details had long been forgotten when, separated by so many years from the occasion of buying the pictures, the *Commodore* brought us to the mouth of the Tauber and we explored up the valley by road. It was when we reached the village of Creglingen that we saw a signpost pointing to the Herrgottskirche, and following the by-road we found the church lying away from the river and over the shoulder of a hill, a chapel built on the site where a ploughman once turned up a communion vessel when tilling the field. When we stepped out of the hot sunshine into the cool interior of the little church we were confronted by what must be one of the greatest and most astonishing pieces of carving in the world. Nearly thirty feet in height, the vast triptych of Riemenschneider stood across the centre of the church, its pale lime-wood glowing in the light filtered through the western window. Below the Madonna and to the left stood the figures I had known for so many years.

The Tauber valley is the home of most of the carvings of Riemenschneider which are not in museums, and it certainly contains his greatest. Within only a few miles of Creglingen one may find his Holy Cross altar in the little village church of Dettwang, and the Holy Blood altar in the Protestant church of St James in Rothenburg. Seeing them one after another we quickly came to know the figures which we were to discover again and again up the valley of the Main — his same hefty, double-chinned Philip, which formed the subject of one of my photographs, the apostle James with his straighter flowing hair and well-trimmed beard, the clean-shaven thin-faced John with the deep-set sorrowing eyes. And down at the foot of the Creglingen altar, looking out from among the doctors of learning in the temple, the portrait of the sad-faced Franconian sculptor and wood-carver himself.

Yet the Taubertal is not a valley of ecclesiastical art alone. It has its vineyards and its orchards — some of them no doubt descended in direct line from the days of Lioba — and its castles and palaces such as that of Weikersheim, which is now the scene of a summer music festival. It was in the vale of the Tauber that the young shepherd Johann Böhm lived, a youth whose delight it was to play on his bagpipes for the dances of the harvest home. One day he mounted a barrel and addressed the crowds of country people taking part in their annual pilgrimage to Niklashausen, and he told them that he had had a vision in which the virgin Mary had told him never to pipe for the dance again but to preach to them that there was to be no more serfdom, no working for the landlords, no payment of tithe or tax or duty, no rights over the land. All were to be free to hunt and fish where they pleased.

Such a vision was popular indeed, and the 'Pfeiferhänschen' next told the men of the Tauber and Jagst and Kocher to assemble on the following Sunday, armed with such weapons as they could muster, but so open and public was the piper's call that news of the intended rising came to the ear of the Bishop of Würzburg, whose armed soldiers sped swiftly to Niklashausen on the Friday night and took the young rebel in his bed. Many of the men who duly assembled on the Sunday marched to Würzburg to ask for his release, but the bishop ordered them to go home. Some wisely did so but others demurred and the bishop's horsemen fell upon them and slew a dozen, taking others prisoner. As for the bagpiper, he was burned at the stake, and for a while the insurrection was crushed.

But the unrest could not be expected to lie dormant for ever. Fifty years later the storm of the Peasants' Revolt broke over the valley, and the sky was dark with the smoke of the monasteries and castles fired by the oppressed peasantry. It was on the old stone bridge over the Tauber at Lauda that their new leader leapt to the parapet opposite the sorrowful figure of the Nepomuk and roused the cheering rabble to burn and plunder the properties of the lords and abbots and bishops, and to distribute their goods. The militia of Rothenburg joined the revolt, and for weeks the countryside was in uproar.



Then came the inevitable day when another man was standing on the parapet of the bridge and this time it was a representative of the long-established order which was not so easily to be broken. Four great wine-barrels were placed on the bridge to support a scaffold, and one by one the captured peasants and farmers were dragged up to it. One by one they knelt, and as the swordsman cleanly struck off their heads their blood spilled over the parapet to redden the stream where it flowed peacefully down the lovely valley to pass the abbeys founded by the gentle Lioba and the zealous Bernhard of Clairvaux, to mingle with the Main below the stronghold of the lords of Wertheim. And whilst these deeds were being done, other young men of Lauda and of Tauberbischofsheim were plying their malets and chisels as apprentices in the workshop of Tilman Riemenschneider in Würzburg, learning to fashion the curling hair and the richly folded dresses of the figures of saints and bishops and apostles, works which were to remain long after the revolt had been stamped out and the names of most of its heroes forgotten.

We could not take the *Commodore* up the Tauber — even her dinghy could go no further up the stream than the first weir — and so we took her out into the Main river to resume her journey further into Bavaria. She had already come one hundred miles up from Mainz, but even now she was not half way to Schweinfurt and we were confident that many attractive places lay ahead of her. And so it was to prove, for every mile of the course upstream was packed with beauty or interest.

The Main makes two sustained attempts to run southward, and the more westerly of these dips towards the equator is the one which ends in the loop of Eichel, a mile or two upstream of the Tauber confluence. Wertheim and Würzburg are only nineteen miles apart, but because of the way in which the Main heads first northward and then to the south again a ship has three times that distance ahead of her before reaching the city of the bishops. At the loop of Eichel, where the Main flows along both sides of a narrow spur of the Spessart, the river swings back so close to its own self beyond the hill that the mistress of the castle of Wettenburg is said long ago to have decided to complete its isolation. Of a particularly

uncharitable nature she would use savage dogs to keep the poor and the beggars from her domain, until one day she hit upon what might have been an even more effective defence, for the story tells that she set her servants to work to complete the isolation of the Wettenburg by cutting a channel through the neck of the promontory on which it stood. Had this legendary attempt been brought to a successful end the Wettenburg Canal would have been as spectacular as the Cut of Corinth, for though only a quarter of a mile long it would have formed a cleft three hundred feet deep across the base of the ridge.

The immensity of the task led her servants, sweating and toiling at such a hard labour, to beg her to give up the work, upon which she angrily declared that her decision was made and that she would no more abandon the scene than would the Wettenburg sink into the ground, or her gold ring — which she drew off and hurled out into the middle of the river — ever be returned to her. No wonder if she paled when at a banquet soon afterwards a fine carp served up to her was found to contain the ring from her finger — one may note that in those days the fish were evidently not gutted before being cooked and served — and if she swooned away it was certainly a merciful anaesthesia, for at midnight the thunder and lightning came to herald the disappearance of the Wettenburg, which sank so deeply into the rock below that only a few crumbled stones remain to the present day to show where once it stood.

On the loop and across from the promontory is a village with the somewhat Levantine name of Urphar, but this has no link with the crusades and is merely a contraction of *Überfahrt*, a ford which probably consisted of a paved causeway crossing the shallows. Had we arrived on the right day in the year we might have seen a spirit rise from the water, not a *Mainweib* or any freshwater species of mermaid but the grey shape of the beautiful daughter of an earlier lord of the Wettenburg, a medieval maiden who still searches the water once a year for her jewellery. Poor thing, when she and her father were forced to flee from enemies she insisted upon taking with her a vanity case filled with such a weight of her personal treasures that although her father passed over in safety she and her horse were swept away and drowned. Fishermen are said

frequently to have searched the river-bed during the succeeding centuries without success, and no doubt any dredgerman of the *Wasser und Schifffahrtsamt* who knows his local lore may still keep his eye on the spoil-buckets when working the Eichel loop. We ourselves saw no grey lady; but curiously enough, on our voyage downstream we struck a submerged object upstream of Wertheim with such force that for the rest of our voyage down the river steering was extremely difficult — because, as the winter slipping showed us, one of the rudders had been bent completely out of shape. Looking back on the incident we felt convinced that only a pile of gold could have given the *Commodore* such a bump.

If the Wettenburg has gone, the tongue of hill opposite Urphar now has inhabitants of a more sympathetic kind. As we ran past its eastern side we noticed that the tall dark pines appeared to be hung with large greyish objects, as though these giant Christmas trees of the very edge of the Spessart had been mysteriously decorated with huge globes blown by forest glass-makers for Christmas itself. Coming a little closer we found that the branches were carrying scores of herons, and that this was another of the haunts from which these beautiful birds would fly off for a few hours of fishing in the local waters or a day excursion towards the Rhine. Yet herons really look more at home on the bank or when paddling in the shallows. However comfortable they may feel among the tree-tops they always have an air of being huddled up tight as though fearful of falling off.

Having only started out from Wertheim in the afternoon, by evening we were no further than Marktheidenfeld, yet another village of fishermen, skippers and pilots. Looking out across the meadowy bank towards the water their neat cottages bore door-knockers which often enough announced their trades, or there might be a small brass-plate announcing that the owner was a *Schiffer* or a *Kapitän*. Further along the bank lay several anchors from the days of the *Leinreiter*, or *Lengreiter* as the people of these villages more often called them, and they had been handsomely painted up in black and red and left there merely to add a pleasantly nautical air to the waterfront. At the foot of an alley which led through towards the main street there stood a tall mast and yard-

arm with the village flag, and around its base the retired captains and boatmen sat smoking cigars and exchanging knowing remarks about the ships which passed by. To them the *Commodore* was not just a curiosity, but a welcome visitor from waters far away which some of them had sailed in their youth, and they welcomed her with friendly nods and understanding glances.

It was a Saturday evening when we arrived, and as we sat over a glass of wine in one of the nautical inns a boy of the village persuaded us to accept, for a small charge, plastic badges bearing the words '*Treffen der Spielmannszüge*'. Only clear in our minds that we were supporting some kind of musical procession we asked him exactly what the badges were for, but he merely answered that it was a *Treffen* and that we should report at an orchard on the edge of the village at nine o'clock. We knew that *Treffen* of one sort or another was something of a national pastime, and so we wandered out of the village in the late evening, following the direction in which the villagers seemed to be moving. Soon we discovered that our badges were tickets of entry to a country dance. Amid the apple trees were set out trestle tables and benches, and village women were hurrying to and fro beneath the branches with armfuls of stone litres of beer. At the end of the meadow a platform of planks had been raised on beer barrels to provide the dance-floor and bandstand.

It was a warm night, and the moon gave just that extra amount of silvery light needed to make the dance a perfect occasion. The band was of trumpets, horns, trombone and tuba, and the heavy Franconian villagers who blew them between their bouts of refreshing beer could never have allowed their beloved instruments to play in the modern idiom of slick unsingable swing. Indeed at times we ourselves sang along with the others as we waltzed and spun at furious perspiring speed, always to those beautiful folk melodies in which Germany is so rich, airs which flowed so easily and unforgettably that after hearing them only once we could have sung them up the river or over the hills. And if we danced until our legs could carry us no further than back to our stone litres and eventually down to the river and our sleeping ship, what particularly impressed us was the behaviour of the boys and girls who had flocked in from the villages outside. That they were healthy and

sound was hardly surprising, but it was with astonishment that we saw the courtesy and old-fashioned politeness with which they hailed each other when they met, or showed their partners to the floor. No loutishness, no rudery, not a hint of a rock or a jive. Not so much as a spiv tie or a pair of tight pants and winkle-pickers was to be seen. The village dance at Marktheidenfeld might have been on another and happier planet for all the resemblance it bore to what was no doubt taking place in the large cities of the same country at that same moment.

Rothenfels (Redcliff), three miles upstream and beyond the pottery village of Hafenlohr, is one of the most dramatic sights of the middle Main. Below the barrage the actual village itself turns only its less attractive side towards the stream and it is when one is first ashore that one finds just what a wealth of pretty houses lies along the village street. Behind it the great cliff of red sandstone from which the village takes its name stands squarely to form a backcloth for the houses, and before the canalization of the Main a finger of the same cliffside lay submerged in midstream to form a red and rocky reef which was such a menace to shipping that it has since been dynamited to increase the breadth and depth of the fairway. The village itself is one of fishers rather than shippers, and its Guild of Fishermen was already flourishing nearly a hundred years before the twelfth-century castle was built at the very top of the rock face to protect the village at its foot. The ascent to the castle is a steep one, more than three hundred steps zigzagging up the face of the cliff, and by the wayside there is a *Bildstock*, showing the figure of a young woman praying, and glancing up towards a ray of light.

Pillars, richly wrought or plain, tall or short and stumpy, sandstone crosses, even occasionally a gallows such as the double-pillared one at Wörth through which the wild ghostly army is said to rush shrieking in the dark — these curious monuments of bygone times are a familiar feature of the Franconian countryside and one finds them at cross-roads, by the side of a vineyard pathway, or standing alone in a field or deep in the forest. The crosses — not calvaries, but plain crosses of stone — are usually set at the site of a murder. The old Germanic law demanded

compensation from the killer, usually in an agreed sum of money, and if this were not forthcoming a blood feud would begin which might continue for generations. The coming of Christianity substituted an emphasis on prayers for the soul of the murdered man to be offered by his killer, and after the cash value of the slain had been agreed the guilty man had also to erect a cross, or sometimes a chapel or other memorial, either at the scene of the crime or at some other more prominent point which the victim's relatives might select.

When in the sixteenth century killing became punishable by hanging, the form of the memorials changed. Until then it was the killer who had been responsible for the monument and he rarely had any great inclination to inscribe upon it his own name and the details of what he had done. But now that the cross or other memorial was erected by the family of the victim, details of the crime and its perpetrator were usually added.

So common are these murder-marks, penitence stones and the like that a single vineyard wall in the Tauber valley has no less than fourteen of them built into it, but the *Bildstock* is more often to be seen standing in its original position. It is a memorial which consists of a pillar, sometimes simple but often beautifully carved, ending in a top-piece which will probably have a cross or a group of angels on one of its faces, and on another perhaps something representative either of the dead person, or of the event which happened there. It is not necessarily a reminder that one man met his death at the hands of another, for it may commemorate any form of sudden death such as falling from a horse. Or perhaps a village girl returning from a country dance was so terrified by the sounds of the forest that she ran, stumbled, and fell to her death. A *Bildstock* near Zwingenberg is on the spot where seven musicians were killed by lightning when sheltering under a tree, and it specifically warns the traveller not to do so.

A *Bildstock* on the path from Rothenfels to Hafenlohr begs the passer-by to say a prayer for the poor soul of the victim, that his sins may be forgiven. This memorial dates only from 1844, and it relates to the death of a tanner of Rothenfels who had gone into the forest for a pleasant evening's poaching when a gamekeeper came

upon the scene. The tanner took to his heels, but without warning him in any way the gamekeeper fired and shot him dead. Where the man fell, the stone was put up as a warning to all those who might be inclined to go poaching, and also to those who might be tempted to fire on their fellows as though they were rats or other vermin. Its erection had a curious sequel, for more than twenty years later the gamekeeper concerned in the incident shot himself and was found dead beside the *Bildstock*, which no doubt had always brought back to him the memory of what he had done, the recollection so preying on his mind that he at last took his own life.

It is not always a violent death which is commemorated in this way, and the memorial beside the steps leading to the castle of Rothenfels, which shows the young woman and the shaft of light, has a very different origin. This stone was put up by a Jewish girl who had wished to adopt the Catholic faith, but was fearful of the anger of her family. On that spot, it is said, she stopped to pray in her bewilderment as to how she should live if she were to be turned out of her family home, penniless. A ray of light struck her as she prayed, and she heard a voice assuring her that she would gain something of far greater value than all her earthly possessions. So, leaving her home, she became a Christian and was taken in and cared for by her fellows in the church community.

Occasionally the origin of a *Bildstock* is less easily made out. There is one in the Spessart which baldly declares that it was 'erected in 1705 by the salt-carriers to the honour of the crucified Lord'. One account suggests that a salt-carrier fell and was trampled upon by the pack-animals, yet survived; another that it commemorates the safe and unexpected arrival of the carriers after a journey across several customs areas where they might well have expected to be robbed officially of much of their goods and money. Another stone, set in a little shrine, reminds one (if one happens to have heard the tale, for there are no details upon the *Bildstock* itself) of how a young farmer's lad returning home at dusk heard screams in the forest, and hastening to the spot found two girls being savagely attacked by a wolf. He rushed to their assistance and beat the animal off with his stick, and when later he and one of the

girls were married they together put up the little shrine in gratitude.

*Rot ist der Fels, grün ist das Land  
über dem lieblichen Main.*

Red the cliff certainly was, and green the land across the stream as we looked out towards it from the top of the tower of the castle. Beyond the roofs at the foot of the cliff we could see away up the river to the lock where the *Commodore* was lying in the sunshine against the mole. Above and below the barrage the ships were awaiting their turns to pass through the pen, but all the while an even greater traffic was climbing unnoticed up the steps of a narrow watery ladder, set to one side of the weir. A census of arrivals taken at the lock had shown that as many as thirty vessels might pass upstream in a day, but in the same period the fish-ladder would often be used by more than six hundred eels and an even greater number of the Main fish which still swarmed in the river in quantities ample enough to provide a livelihood for the fishermen in a dozen little waterside towns along the curving forest reaches.

One of these villages was Erlach, not far above the lock of Rothenfels, and once again we found it to be a place of ship-owners and sailors, dredgermen and fishers. Its particular pride, however, was in the ship *Kinderglück* of Kapitän Bils, the last of the Main ships to survive from the days of horse haulage.

When hauled upstream by the teams of the *Lengreiter*, a ship would have a stout mast to which the tow-line would be attached at a considerable height in order that the rope would not foul the bankside scrub and bushes. The same mast would often serve to support a derrick, and all the loading and unloading would be carried out with this simple tackle. But when the chain-ships and river-tugs appeared, the line could lie low along the water and there was no possibility of fouling the bankside scrub and willows, so the masts — which had always to be unshipped when passing through all but the highest bridges — were done away with. Only Kapitän Bils retained his mast and wooden derrick, with which he could hoist a three-ton load to lower it into the *Kinderglück's* hold. For years he carried on in his own way, and when at last his good



ship retired from service her mast was acquired by the Shippers' Association of Mainz and erected on the bank of the Rhine. There it can still be seen by travellers on the sleek modern passenger craft, standing as a memorial to the vanished horse-teams and their riders which once hauled the cargoes from Holland up the Main towards the canal which crossed the thirteen-hundred foot high watershed to reach the Danube.

Upstream through Lohr we came at last to Gemünden, where the two tributaries Sinn and Fränkische Saale flow in together from the hills of the Rhön. We turned cautiously into their communal mouth, and carefully sounding our way we passed under the railway bridge to draw in beside the eel-punts which flanked another delightful row of fishermen's houses not unlike those of Wertheim. We were almost alongside, with six inches of water beneath the *Commodore's* keel, when a tank-ship plugging down the main river outside drew off the water to such an extent that the level in the Saale fell by a foot or more within two or three seconds. The *Commodore* was dropped heavily to the bottom and leaned over to one side.

Half a minute later the water flowed in again to float her, but as it was obvious that this stranding might happen twenty or thirty times a day we at once began to pole her out stern first — for there was no room to turn. The tanker, as we had already suspected, proved to be only the first ship of four which had passed the last lock together, and the second of them came frothing past the entrance before we had reached the bridge. Once again we subsided, waited, refloated, and began to push with the poles. The third craft came in its turn and it drew off the water to leave us on a shingle bank under the railway bridge, but before the fourth arrived we were out in deeper water. Then, turning downstream, we ran back half a mile below the town to where a refuge harbour against ice was cut round behind the river bank. There was room for a hundred ships, but we shared the haven only with a derelict hand-dredger and the service launch of the *Wasser und Schifffahrtsamt*. Having made the *Commodore* thoroughly comfortable and ready to spend three whole days on her own, we set off early next morning to drive down to Oberammergau.

## IX

*Return from Oberammergau — Karlstadt's Swede — the loss of the bell — Glauber — Veitshöchheim — the approach to Würzburg — Kilian's decision — the Neumünster — the bishops of magnificence — navigation works — the fate of the eels*

Of the Oberammergau Passion there is nothing to tell. The story is well enough known of the way in which the plague came to the town in the Ammer Valley, and how the burghers vowed to perform in perpetuity their dramatization of the final week of the life of Christ. These things have often been related, together with details of who may or may not take part, how the villagers grow their flowing locks, and such curiosities as that policemen — who may not go about with hair down to their shoulders — are necessarily placed among the Romans. Yet all this has as much or as little to do with the Oberammergau Passion as has the thatch of Ann Hathaway's cottage with the essence of *Hamlet*, and the play (if that is the right word for a fearlessly straight rendering of the Gospel) is something which can never be adequately described in human terms. It is not the brilliant staging of the Old Testament stills which remains with one after visiting Oberammergau, nor just the realization that one can never again read the New Testament, or even hear it read in the ponderous prose of the King James version, without seeing the incidents as they were acted on the Oberammergau stage, so much as the searing feeling that one was actually there on the edge of the mad and pitiless crowd of first-century Jerusalem, not joining in the cheering but remaining mute, too cowardly to raise a finger in protest at what was happening.

When Judas discovers what it really means to be a disciple, and discovers that the Kingdom of God will involve sacrifice and

renunciation of power, persecution and the disdain of his fellows, he decides that such is not for him. '*Ich nicht, ich nicht!*' With cold and terrible realism he speaks not for himself alone but for mankind across the ages. Perhaps one comforts oneself with the thought that we are more civilized now, and if the mission of Jesus happened in our own day he would not be crucified. Indeed he would not. He would be given half a column in the Sunday papers and written off as a well-meaning man, but what a pity he is such a crank. Let him have a soap-box in Hyde Park where he can let off steam; the police can keep a good-humoured and watchful eye upon him and if there's any trouble — well, the magistrate can be relied upon to refer him kindly to a psychiatrist. We carry out our executions much more subtly today than the Romans did, but the pain of the crucifixion is none the less real. Perhaps it is even greater than that inflicted with the solid hardware of hammer and nails.

It was not altogether surprising if these thoughts haunted our minds as we returned aboard the *Commodore* to resume our Bavarian voyage through a land rich in the works of Grünewald and Riemenschneider and many others who had sought through their own special insights to interpret to their fellows the realism of the passion and resurrection. But the Main also had other things to offer us, and when we left the ice-harbour of Gemünden we were soon to emerge from the forest reaches of the river and enter a very different landscape, the limestone country of the wine villages. Slowly the hills of the Spessart fell away and we were moving up a gentle vale through a rich agricultural upland where the rolling vistas of golden corn were spotted with farms and hamlets and the steeples of village churches. The bells still pealed to remind us that this, too, was the Franconian Main, but the bold sandstone cliffs with the fortresses of robber knights now lay astern. Beyond the lock of Harrbach we came round the bend of a wood to see ahead of us a town which might have stepped right out of the frame of a sixteenth-century painting.

No other town on any of the magnificent rivers of Germany presents quite the same astonishing appearance as Karlstadt on the Main. The waterfront is one long wall of pale grey stone, with here

and there a steepled tower standing up nervously, ready to sound the alarm if an approaching ship should prove to be carrying concealed beneath its hatches an armed band of the terrible Swedes. So high is the containing wall that the houses seem to stand on tip-toe to allow their upper windows to peep suspiciously over it to the river, and although they appear friendly enough it is obvious that they do not wish to risk exposing themselves indecently to the rude gaze of the coarse shipmen on the barges. The navigation channel flows close against the shore, and as there was no quayside we drew in against a tug which was waiting its turn to tow a pair of barges upstream to the cement factory, and climbing across it we jumped ashore beside the startled geese. A slit of a door opened in the town wall and a man came out with a horse, as though despatched by the mayor and aldermen to scour the valley for any sight of invaders. A small archway stood open beside one of the bastion towers, the Maintor, and glancing up to make sure that no quicklime, boiling oil or molten lead was to be poured on us, we hurried through it into the town. At the end of a narrow street stood the gothic town hall with a high gable mounting in eight steps to a little belfry, and below this there stood in a niche above the clock the figure of a young man with flowing locks, dressed in gay coloured jerkin and baggy hose down to his knees, and with a smart military hat decorated with a cockade. His left hand was placed jauntily on his hip, and in his right he held a thick and straight trumpet. His uniform was not that of any bygone Karlstadt militia, for in fact he was a trumpeter of the forces of Gustavus Adolphus.

However much the Swedes may have been disliked — and not without reason — the *Schwedenmännlein* of Karlstadt is the town hero, and it is only right that he has been given the honour of standing high above the market place where he may continue to raise his trumpet to his lips when the hand of the clock points to the hour, for his trumpeting once saved the town even if it cost him his life. The story of the Little Swedish Man is probably founded on fact, and it tells how the mighty Gustavus came storming up the valley ahead of the cloud of smoke which rose from the villages his troops had sacked, and the citizens of Karl-

stadt were very naturally filled with alarm. They had their town walls, but they had little inclination to suffer bombardment and siege, so very prudently they opened the gates and let the Swedish monarch enter without a shot being fired. They even invited him into the town hall for a beaker of wine, and the sea-green enamelled glass from which he drank is still to be seen in the council chamber.

Whilst these courtesies were taking place, elsewhere in the town love at first sight was impelling the royal trumpeter to court a beautiful girl of Karlstadt. Her name is not recorded, but whoever she may have been she was not one to resist the advances of the gallant young Swede — at least, only so far as to make a very proper bargain with him. She would be his, this heroine of Karlstadt declared, and he might come to her that very same night if he would just do one simple little thing to prove to her that he really loved her, to show her that he was not a mere unfeeling unit of licentious soldiery.

Driven by gallantry or desire, or perhaps by love, the young man said that he would do anything that she wished — as young men so frequently and foolishly do. Whatever she should ask of him, her request would be a command which he would not hesitate for one moment to obey. History does not relate whether he was surprised when she whispered to him that all she asked was not that he should bring her some victuals from the quartermaster's stores but just that he should take up his trumpet in the small hours of the morning and blow a signal to indicate that a force was approaching the town to relieve it.

The bargain was kept. The girl took her new-found lover to her arms, and in the middle of the night he left her to break the slumbers of the Swedes by sounding the Retreat, or the Advance, or whatever it was that conveyed the appropriate message. The tired troopers stumbled sleepily from their beds, the cavalrymen flung the saddles over their horses, the officers shouted their commands, and soon the entire Swedish contingent was issuing from the town to attack the relief column, which they believed to be approaching in the darkness. When the last of them had passed through the gateway, the burghers emerged to swing the stout gates shut and to bar and bolt them against a return. But the Swedes

did not come back — at least not then, for it was not until some time later that Gustavus Adolphus returned in person to supervise the improvement of the walls so that Karlstadt might become a Swedish fortress town. For the gay-hearted young trumpeter the story did not end so happily. Gustavus was not the man to treat such a matter lightly, and the unfortunate youth was hanged, but even today he is thought of with affection and gratitude by the people of Karlstadt as he raises his wooden arm to blow a mute call upon his trumpet.

A simple tale is told of the same councillors who admitted the Swedes so easily. When the troops of Gustavus were still many miles down the valley, the council anxiously discussed how they might preserve their bell — for the Swedish king's fondness for removing bells either to melt them down or to ship them to embellish the culture of Scandinavia was well known. Was it not already rumoured that one of the bells of Aschaffenburg had been lost in the Main on its way down the river? Perhaps it was this which prompted one of the councillors to think of the river as a suitable place where the bell might be hidden until the Swedes had come and gone.

His colleagues were doubtful, and they considered that although sinking the bell in the Main would be easy enough, to recover it again would not be so simple. How could they be sure where it lay on the broad bed of the river?

Whenever a council is faced with an intractable problem, sooner or later real intelligence will make itself known. This was also the case at Karlstadt, according to the story, for after some time of indecision a particularly wise member of the council hit upon the solution. If the bell were shipped, he said, it could be carried along the river to some distance from the town, and where they lowered it overboard they could easily cut a notch in the side of the ship to mark the spot. His sensible advice was adopted, and after the Swedes had retired from the valley the salvage operations were started. It seemed, however, that something was wrong, for although a grapple was repeatedly let down over the spot marked by the nick, the bell was never recovered.

Karlstadt may rightly feel superior to other towns of the Main

shipmen, for its statue of their patron St Nicholas is no ordinary carving and the strangely melancholy expression achieved by a few bold cuts of the features proclaims it immediately as the work of Tilman Riemenschneider himself. Yet the town's particular pride is of a very different kind, and a modern fountain of red sandstone in the form of a pestle and mortar, set in the market place, reminds visitors that Johann Rudolph Glauber was a man of Karlstadt. Although his name is usually associated with his 'miraculous salt' (sodium sulphate) this young man who set out to tour Europe as a mirror-silverer and apothecary was in fact one of those who laid the foundations of the chemical industry. It was not theory with which Glauber was concerned, but practical experimentation, and most of his discoveries are given — if somewhat incompletely — in his *Furni novi Philosophici*, which was actually an instruction handbook on building laboratory furnaces but also gave the rough outlines of the experiments which a chemist might carry out with them. From this book, which had a great influence on Robert Boyle, it is clear that Glauber had discovered much about the preparation of metallic salts, and that he had prepared benzol and phenol, acetone, strychnine and morphine, nearly two hundred years before these organic substances were again to be isolated. He also showed the effect upon crops of an artificial fertilizer (potassium nitrate), and the manufacture of nitric and hydrochloric acids is even today carried out by the process he developed.

A kindly man, tolerant in matters of religion and even when his first wife was unfaithful to him, Glauber's life was one of misfortune. After hard years in the Netherlands he removed to Bremen, but he was soon obliged to flee from the city on account of his debts and he set off by ship up the Weser to reach Kassel on the Fulda and from thence cross by wagon to the Main at Hanau, bringing his wife and children, his furniture, books and laboratory apparatus with him. Continuing again by ship he landed at Wertheim to establish his laboratory, but very soon he was to be evicted by his landlord. He moved on up the river to Kitzingen where he again founded his laboratory. Soon he was engaged in quarrels with another chemist to whom he had sold certain of his

recipes, and he became even more secretive than he had been before.

It may have been such experiences which led Glauber to announce as his maxim the principle, 'Do not all that thou canst; say not all that thou knowest; believe not all that thou hearest.' Certainly he lived up to the second part of it, for he tended to keep to himself some vital detail of any chemical process and only release it under licence and against payment. This may sound a very mercenary procedure, but it must be remembered that Glauber was not an alchemist working in the pay (or perhaps in the prison) of a wealthy patron, and he could only support his research laboratory and his assistants out of the takings. Nevertheless, the secrecy was strongly disapproved of by Boyle, who very much criticized the way he described the preparation of sodium sulphate from salt by 'pouring in A', without saying what 'A' might be. (Boyle repeated the experiment and rightly concluded that 'A' was sulphuric acid.) But if Robert Boyle found Glauber's experiments 'described so darkly and ambiguously that it is not easy to know with any certainty what he means,' he himself had no need to sell his discoveries, for he lived in great affluence upon a private income of several thousand pounds a year. And even if he disapproved, he recognized the remarkable ability of the Franconian chemist and read his works as soon as he could obtain them.

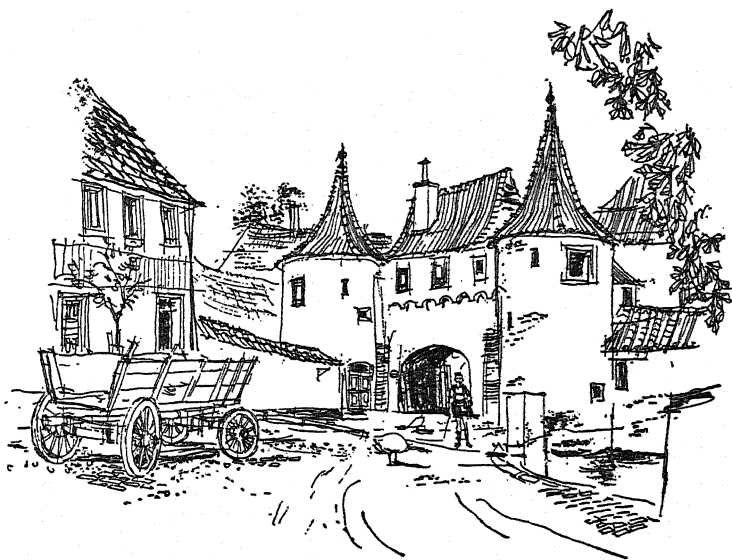
Glauber eventually returned to Holland, and it was his horror at the sufferings of the Dutch sailors on their voyages to the East Indies which led him to perform the experiments which were published in his book *Trost der Seefahrenten* ('The Navigators' Comfort), a work in which he recommended various remedies for hunger, thirst, and scurvy. He prescribed a malt extract from which a beer-like drink could be made by sailors, and he prepared experimentally a kind of dried biscuit-bread which was concentrated and yet would not become mouldy. He even attempted to tackle the age-old problem of how to make fresh water from the sea.

But Glauber's health was already declining and during the last ten years of his life he was to suffer terribly from mercuric or



arsenical poisoning contracted during his experiments. Racked with pain, and often vomiting blood, he was at last unable to leave his bed and he could only direct others to carry out experiments for him. Eventually he was obliged to dismiss his assistants and even to sell his books and apparatus in order to have the means to feed himself and his family. He died in poverty at Amsterdam, in 1670.

Above Karlstadt and for almost the whole of the way to Schweinfurt, one side or other of the river is renowned for its wine. Zelligen, Thüngersheim and Veitshöchheim, almost every village we passed on our way up towards Würzburg had its own vintages bottled in the dark green broad-bellied *Bocksbeutel* which are used for the wines of the Main. These bottles are a glass substitute for the original naturally occurring flagon of the same name, for it was formerly the custom of the wine-growers to use a real *Bocksbeutel* — the scrotum of a billy-goat — as a suitable container for the wine, though in more modern days a certain sense of respectability among wine-drinkers (or perhaps a shortage of he-goats) has led to the adoption of glass. We were assured by one grocer that the wine had suffered in consequence, lacking that



something which only the smell of a billy-goat could give it. But this, no doubt, was a matter of opinion.

At Veitshöchheim there is a regional viticultural institute which is not above selling its products across the counter in the summer residence of the bishops of Würzburg, one of whom laid out the vast ornamental and episcopal gardens near the river — ornamental, that is, to the European eye rather than to the English, which soon tires of mile upon mile of clipped hedges and begins to long for an honest herbaceous border. But the rococo figures of Ferdinand Dietz are famous, and the little *putto* who has raided the dressing-up drawer to appear in one instance as a rather flighty woman and in another as a dashing cavalier are sweet reminders of the gaiety which once attended the garden festivities of the episcopal rulers. Operetta, illuminations, open-air suppers, fanfares of trumpets, torchlight processions, stag-hunting, chamber music among the walks and hedges beneath the summer starlight, these were among the entertainments which a rococo bishop would provide for the aristocracy invited to visit him in his summer residence, and for such light-hearted entertainments Veitshöchheim must have been an excellent setting.

The approach to Würzburg by river is splendid. First there comes into view the palace fortress of the Marienburg, standing solid and defiant on the top of its hill, but it is still several miles distant as the river leads up from Veitshöchheim to pass below the monastery of Zell and turn a bend to where the silos and the smooth modern warehouses of the port lie shining and opulent along the basins on the northern bank. At the point, the hull of *K.B.K.S. IV* is moored to supply oil and paint, steel hawsers, cotton waste, pitch, paraffin, mops and buckets to its successors in the Main towage trade, and behind the port the famous hillside of the Stein slopes down grey and dusty towards the town, decked out with the neat geometrical rows of vines which will provide a wine fit for royal banquets. Abruptly the dock area ceases and the river sweeps through a no-man's-land of meadow, derelict wharves and rubbish, to pass under the unspectacular Luitpolds bridge into the town. A moment later the full glory of Würzburg bursts into view, its domes and spires peeping up from among the roofs

on the port side. Quickly the waterside changes again, and on the same bank stands an immense bastion of grey stone through which the streets run as tunnels. Next, beyond the steamer jetty, is a second and round tower of stone, but this is not a fortification. It has a rotating shingled roof from which protrude two jibs, one long and one short, both of them clothed as cranes originally and properly were, in what appears at a distance to be a suit of greyish feathers. This ingenious double crane, second only in fame to the great medieval treadmill crane of Bruges, was built in the eighteenth century and its swinging head could reach out over the ships hauled up from Mainz by the horse-teams, pull up the bales of cargo and swing round to lower them to the wagons in the roadway behind. Next comes the town-hall tower or Grafeneckart, once the residence of the thirteenth-century count from whom it takes its name, and spanning the river beside it the five arches of the glorious gothic Alte Brücke, with the lock entrance beneath the right-hand arch and the weir-stream flowing and bubbling green and pure through the others — water so clean even in the city itself, that housewives who prefer soft water to the hard municipal supply kneel in public washboats moored along the bank to dip their laundry over the edge and scrub the linen on gleaming boards.

The Alte Brücke once had its two westerly arches bridged only by wooden planks which could be hastily drawn out if an enemy approached, but in the eighteenth century the roadway and parapets were completed in masonry. In 1945 two of the arches were foolishly blown up and some of the twelve figures who stood on guard over the buttresses were flung into the river or severely damaged, as others had been shortly before on the terrible evening of March 16th. Until that moment Würzburg, with its countless treasures of Neumann and Tiepolo, Riemenschneider and a score of others had escaped, but in one fearful twenty minutes nine-tenths of the buildings of the old city centre were reduced to ruins, and in the heat of the blaze as the most beautiful of all the German cities went up in flames hundreds of its people, half-crazed in their attempt to escape, plunged through the choking smoke and burning wreckage into the river, where many of them were

drowned. On that morning Würzburg had had a population of 100 thousand, but next day there were only five thousand to be found among the cellars and the heaps of wreckage of the great works of the master builders whose gothic, renaissance, baroque and rococo dreams were now indistinguishable. The rest of the survivors had fled into the surrounding country.

So complete was the devastation that the task of rebuilding the city at all was at first considered impossible. But for centuries Würzburg had been a centre of master masons, of ironworkers, of the painters and woodworkers who had been drawn there in the days of episcopal magnificence, and slowly they got to work. Now, fifteen years later, as the *Commodore* waited below the lock, the city stood once more in most of its former glory, with only the scaffolding on some of the towers to hint that the rebuilding in every detail of the work of former centuries could not be entirely overcome in a brief fifteen years.

It is the Alte Brücke, connecting the city with the foot of the Marienberg hill, which gives to Würzburg at once its unity and its sense of age and piety. The eleven figures — they had been salvaged from the river when we arrived, and only one of the original twelve was still missing — face each other in two rows from side to side of the river, and one of them is the Englishman St Burkhard, the first Bishop of Würzburg and the man who was appointed by Boniface to be head of the Franconian church and to consolidate the work begun by the Irish monks before him, whose zeal sometimes outstripped their discipline. The three Irishmen to whom Würzburg owes its foundation as a great ecclesiastical city are also to be seen on the bridge, and their leader Kilian stands majestically in a flowing robe, holding in his left hand a short sword whilst his right is raised in blessing over the city towards which his powerful face is turned. Close to him are his companions Totnan and Kolonat, the only two who remained faithful to him of the original eleven who set out from Ireland — for when the missionary team went to Rome to consult the Pope the others chose to remain there.

Kilian is the true father of Franconia, and even Burkhard takes second place to this courageous Irishman. When we arrived in the

city there were preparations for water-jousting and for a firework display over the river, for this was the festival of St Kilian and for a whole week the city was to be thronged with pilgrims, men and women from the Bavarian villages who had flocked to Würzburg not only for the fun of the fair but also to queue outside the crypt of the cathedral to await their turn in the chapel where the skulls of the three Irish monks were brought out and placed on the altar table in front of the wooden figures of the men themselves, copies of Riemenschneider carvings burned in the recent destruction of the city. And many would take the opportunity, as we did ourselves, of seeing the *Kilianfestspiel* acted out in the court behind the cathedral and thus learn of the circumstances which led to his death.

There seems little doubt that the history of Kilian as given in Alo Heuler's play '*Die Entscheidung*' (The Decision) is substantially correct, and the dilemma in which he was placed is such an intriguing one that it might well be set as a question in the finals papers of ordination candidates. It was the same conflict between discipline and humanity which may be found today in the arguments for and against divorce and remarriage, but in an unusual and more acute form.

When in the seventh century Kilian and his two companions came to Franconia they were well received by Gospert, the Duke of the Franks, a fine Merovingian ruler of strong character. He accepted the teaching of the Irishmen and professed the desire to become a Christian, but at this point Kilian refused to baptize him. Gospert, he said, could not become a Christian unless he first put away his wife Gailane. It so happened that Gailane had been married off as a child to another noble, a tough character who had not only proceeded to murder her father but had treated his young wife with the greatest cruelty, finally deserting her and fleeing as an outlaw to Friesland, where he had now joined Radbod in his revolt. Gospert had fallen in love with the girl and had taken her as his wife, and they had a family of young children. To many this might seem to have been an admirable solution, but in the eyes of Kilian Gospert had taken the wife of another man who was alive and was in fact an adulterer. Though perfectly

aware of Gospert's character, and not doubting that he greatly loved his wife, Kilian insisted that unless the home were broken up and the young duchess sent away, Gospert could certainly not be permitted to join the Christian Church. No matter how unimpeachable Gospert's motives might have been, the great could no more disregard the teachings of the Church on marriage than could the small. Nor did it matter that he had taken Gailane before he had heard the gospel which Kilian and his companions were now preaching. If the Church in Franconia was to be founded it must stick to the rules, or else — quite apart from the commandments and doctrines of sacrament — it could not hope to survive.

To say that Gailane did not see eye to eye with Kilian would be an understatement. His attitude naturally aroused her anger, for she correctly saw his teaching as menacing everything of beauty and happiness which she had at last found after her tragic youth. But she thought of a way out — at least in the play, if not in history. Her husband Gospert was summoned to help Pippin subdue the rebellious Frisians, and if he could contrive to seek out her former husband and slay him in battle she would then be married only to Gospert and all would be well. Kilian conceded this point, but he refused to advise Gospert to slay the man, for he would not be killing him merely in indiscriminate and proper warfare but in order to extricate himself from being an adulterer. Gailane herself begged her husband to do as she said, and in fact during the battle when Radbod's forces were routed he came upon the villain unarmed and could easily have slain him. Yet his conscience would not permit him to do so and he turned away, refusing to take so simple an escape from making the decision demanded of him.

When Gospert returned home, he found that his wife had not been prepared to wait. She had summoned the Irishmen and told them that she would put them to death if Kilian insisted on having her separated from the only man she regarded as her true husband. One of Kilian's companions then urged him to think again, pointing out that if the three of them, the only apostles to Franconia, were to be killed over a disciplinary point of this nature the result would merely be that the Church which now had every oppor-

tunity of making headway among the German tribes would be strangled at its birth. Martyrdom was fair enough, but was it honestly right to accept death, or even more to court it, over the matter of Gailane's relationship to Gospert which, by all human standards, was just such a one as the Church itself endeavoured to teach?

But Kilian was not to be moved, and when Gospert returned victorious from Friesland he found that the three men had been beheaded and their bodies flung down the well in the stables. Over the site of their martyrdom the first cathedral of Würzburg was built by Burkhard only sixty years later, and in the eleventh century the Neumünster was raised above the stable well. The well itself, complete with hoist-pulley for the bucket, is set in the floor of the Kilian's crypt, and it is to this vault that the pilgrims throng in July of each year. Against the wall lies the coffin of the sincere and uncompromising Kilian of Ireland.

The question is still, as it was thirteen centuries ago, whether Kilian was right. That the spread of Christianity throughout Franconia was not prevented by the murder of himself and his two companions is true enough — though this is of course only known from hindsight. What would a modern churchman make of the same problem, and would he take the same view as Kilian did, whether martyrdom was involved or not? And if Kilian was mistaken, as many might well think, where precisely did his error lie? These are the questions which might well provide an intellectual exercise for ordinands, and a not altogether inappropriate foretaste of similar problems which may unexpectedly confront any man in his ministry. It is not surprising that Kilian's predicament should have endeared him to the people in later ages. That, and his undoubted courage, have caused his memory to be held in great affection throughout Franconia, long after the names of many of his contemporaries survive only in the writings of the Venerable Bede.

Above the Kilian crypt the Neumünster was being restored when we visited it, and the nave was already complete. It is only one of the many pieces of baroque magnificence in Würzburg, but it contains one of Riemenschneider's most famous works in his

red sandstone Madonna and Child. Across the nave from this is the so-called Plague Cross, which is held in great veneration by pilgrims. The unique posture of this crucified Christ has never been satisfactorily explained, but a strange legend tells that the cross was once decorated with a costly chain of gold, presented by a man in fulfilment of a vow. One night a robber entered the crypt of the Neumünster where the cross used to stand, and climbing up towards it he stretched out his hand to remove the chain when something happened which gave him the fright of his life. The wooden figure withdrew its arms from the cross-beam, pulling out the nails as it did so, and flung them round the thief to hold him in so tight a grip that try as he would he could not wrench himself free. Terrified he yelled for help, and those who ran to the crypt seized him and extricated him from the grasp of the statue to drag him off to justice. But the arms of the figure on the cross did not return to their original position. They remained where they are to this day, crossed in front of the emaciated body just as though gripping an attacker. Sure enough, the nails are still there, driven through the palms — but of the golden chain there is no sign.

Outside, in the small garden court of the cloisters, lies the tomb of the greatest of all the Minnesingers, Walther von der Vogelweide. Held in the highest esteem by the Staufener emperors, he was allowed to pass his declining years within the precincts of the Neumünster, and when he died he willed that four holes should be cut in a stone and lined with bowls in which grain and water should always be set out for his particular friends the little birds. Walther's wish was carried out, and the birds still come to his grave in the open air of the tiny courtyard. As we stood in the cloisters we saw an old woman hurry in with a paper bag of crusts and crumbs and throw them to the sparrows and chaffinches which were waiting impatiently at the table of his tomb.

That Würzburg should be described as the 'German Canterbury' is misleading, for all that it has in common with the city of Kent is that it was the site of the first church in its particular area, and later of a famous cathedral see and ecclesiastical centre. Würzburg has so many splendid buildings and foundations that one could fill a book with a description of them. On the city side of



the river alone there is the *Residenz*, the palace of the Prince-Bishops built by Balthasar Neumann, with its famous double staircase and the largest painted ceiling in the world — by good fortune this immense Tiepolo painting was not destroyed when most of the *Residenz* was burned out in the Würzburg raid. There is the Bürgerspital of the Holy Ghost, the Marienkapelle with its blazing Madonna on the tip of the steeple, the cathedral (as opposed to the Neumünster which adjoins it) and the Stift Haug, the churches of St Stephen and St Peter, and the Juliusspital founded by the energetic bishop Julius Echter of Mespelbrunn, under whom the city rose at the end of the sixteenth century to its first richness of beauty before Gustavus Adolphus arrived to destroy it and to steal what he could. But even Gustavus did not seize the Juliusspital, for into its title deeds the bishop had written a most explicit curse upon any who should dare lay hands upon the hospital and its property. The Swedish king is said to have read the document, decided that prudence would be better even than pillaging the buildings, and to have left it well alone. So the foundation survives to this day as the municipal hospital which Echter intended it to be, and it escaped the confiscation of its lands. It still owns the rich vineyards of the Stein, and at one corner of the hospital there is the most attractive *Weinstube* in which one can spend the evening over a *Juliusspitalplatte* with Bocksbeutel flagons of its highly prized vintage wines. The only disappointment is that although these treats are to be had by the healthy within the precincts of the hospital itself, such services must be paid for (though not expensively) and cannot be had merely by flashing a National Health ticket at the waiter.

If Julius Echter carried Würzburg to its first period of magnificence, the three bishops of the house of Schönborn were responsible for its even greater glory in baroque times. Masons and sculptors, poets and musicians and painters were attracted to their court from far and wide. To mention only a few, among the painters who came to leave their mark on the Würzburg of the Schönborns were Appiani of Milan, Pellegrini and the Tiepolos from Venice, Zick of Munich. The landscape gardener Mayer came from Prague, the sculptor Auwera from Mechlen, Curé from

Paris, and Tietz from Bohemia. Experts in stucco were drawn from Switzerland and Italy, and master joiners, locksmiths, iron-workers and masons were brought in from all over Europe. Above all, perhaps, Würzburg's baroque owes most to two architects, Dientzenhofer of Bamberg and particularly the young Balthasar Neumann who curiously enough was an officer in the Franconian artillery and is shown as such, reclining by a cannon, in the magnificent Tiepolo ceiling of the Residenz, where on summer evenings the Würzburg municipal orchestra gives court concerts very much as they must have been in the days of the Schönborns except that the audience is perhaps less magnificent. They are held in the ornamental garden, or if wet in the garden salon of the Residenz itself, beneath another luxuriant ceiling by Zick and the pale blue icing scrolls of stucco by Bossi.

We had the good fortune to be able to attend several of these concerts in the former palace of the Lord Bishops Schönborn, for the *Commodore* was to spend more than a fortnight at Würzburg, lying very contentedly at the quay above the old bridge. That she would do so was something which we had not foreseen when planning our voyage into Bavaria, but it so happened that when the time came for us to return down the river from further upstream the season had arrived when the *Wasser und Schiffsahrtsamt* proposed to put in hand a programme of major works on the Main waterway. About one reach in three was to be drained for repairs to the banks and locks, and all ships were to leave the affected sections by six o'clock on the Sunday night, after which navigation would be impossible until two weeks later. Seven of the locks would be out of commission, and so the *Commodore* had either to beat down almost the entire way to Mainz, 210 miles and 32 locks distant, and accomplish the entire journey within two days, or she could pick the most suitable place at which to have a fortnight's rest. Whether or not she could have achieved the former, she had no desire to leave the Main so quickly, and she had little difficulty in deciding that of all the places on the Main where she could happily spend two weeks in idleness none was more attractive than Würzburg. The city lock was to be closed and the reach beyond it lowered by several feet, but the one above was only to fall some

thirty inches, and if she lay within a few yards of the weir she would still have enough water to remain comfortably afloat.

When on the Saturday afternoon she took up her station at the chosen spot a whole flotilla of work-boats, cranes and dredgers — some of them from as far distant as the Elbe — was already assembled by the lock, and on the stroke of the appointed time of closure three trestle-stands of steel scaffolding, already made to measure, were lowered into the pen. Whilst one floating crane lifted down to them the giant pumps which had been brought up on barges, another was busily swinging out coffer-dam sections to barricade the water from the reach below. The whole operation was brilliantly planned, and very soon the three six-inch pipes were throwing their jets of water over the lock-gates as the huge pen was pumped out.

At the same time, work of a different kind was beginning in the reach below the weir. In connection with the opening of the Rhine-Main-Danube route for 2000-ton ships which was expected to take place nine years later, the waterway authority was already widening the navigation channel which at this particular point had been blasted out of a river-bed of solid rock. To enlarge the fairway a gigantic chisel had been brought up and mounted on a ship rigged with pile-driving gear. Hiss . . . tonk, hiss . . . tonk, the blows of the steam hammer echoed back from the walls of the houses and under the arches of the Alte Brücke as the chisel, several inches in diameter was driven foot by foot into the rock at the edge of the channel. Then it had to be pulled out again by winching the vessel over until she seemed in imminent danger of capsizing, but always just in time she would straighten with a steamy sigh of relief and rock back to an even keel. Every yard the process was repeated and the river bottom littered with giant boulders which could then be lifted out by a floating grab.

The steam chisel did not carry on after dark, but work on the lock continued. At midnight the pumps were still thundering their streams of water out beneath the feet of the four most westerly saints on the parapet, and walking back to the *Commodore* where she lay safely tethered by four lines and her anchor-chain a few feet above the open weir, we turned in for the night. It was only next

morning that we realized how foolish we had been to do so. By about four o'clock the last inches of water were being drained out, and more than four hundred eels wriggled unhappily out of the drying culverts and sluice-channels to be scooped up by the engineers and maintenance staff who, of course, had stayed up all night for that very purpose. By the time we crossed the bridge to the early service in the Deutschhauskirche, the Lutheran church close behind the water-jousting pitch, all trace of the eels had vanished and we could only regret that our inexcusable lack of foresight had deprived us of such an excellent breakfast. Sorrowfully we hoped that on some future occasion we might find another lock being pumped out, in which case we would if necessary do without sleep for days on end rather than miss that finest of dishes, a fine, fat, fresh eel of the river.

## X

*Riemenschneider of Würzburg — the Käppele — a goldsmith's workshop — rafting on the Main — the clock of Ochsenfurt — village of vintners — the wines of Frickenhausen — upstream to Kitzingen — the Commodore under suspicion*

THE two weeks during which the *Commodore* lay at the Würzburg quayside passed quickly enough, and the city held so much to attract us that we never found the time weighing heavily upon us. Indeed we soon were grateful to the water-rats of the *Wasser und Schifffahrtsamt* for our enforced stay, without which we might never have explored the city of bishops and nuns and priests and pastors so fully. Nor could we ever have found a more attractive berth, for our last sight at night as we looked out of the hatch was the splendid fortress of the Marienburg, floodlit on the summit of the steep Marienburg hill immediately across the water, and every morning the rays of the sun rising over the rolling land to the east of the city would strike against its ramparts and towers and turrets to light it once more in the fresh brilliance of another day.

We never tired of the Marienburg, whether we were looking up to it across the water over the early morning tea, or toiling up the slope to pass through the tunnels which pierced its ramparts and gaze out from its terrace across the river to the city of spires and domes. In its courtyard stood the remarkable Marienkirche from which the hill took its name, a church which was there before Burkhard was appointed first Bishop of Würzburg in 742 and which must have owed its foundation to the influence of Kilian, for it was built in 706, only seventeen years after his death, and no doubt it was placed on the summit of the hill to take advantage of some already existing hill-top worship of a goddess of the Ger-

manic people. Though set ablaze in the raid of 1945, when much of the palace surrounding it was burned out, this oldest stone building of Franconia had walls massive enough to give it the strength to stand up to its fate and it remains to this day as a most impressive example of the solid and glorious age of the powerful Frankish kings.

Down at the foot of the hill the church of St Burkhard rises up beside the wall of the lock, near the site where he and his twelve companions founded the Benedictine monastery which was in later centuries to be moved further along the river bank and renamed after its founder. Inside it is one of the very last of the carvings of Riemenschneider, but only one of many within Würzburg — for if the Tauber valley proudly holds three of his most famous groups of carvings the city of which he was mayor can boast more than thirty of his works, many of them in its churches and the remainder in the Mainfränkisches Museum inside the Marienburg fortress, where he himself was to be imprisoned.

When the nineteen-year-old Tilman Riemenschneider came to Würzburg the thunderclouds of reformation and revolt were already in the air. It was only a year since the great Alsatian reformer Geiler of Kaysersberg had preached in the cathedral of the city, declaiming against the hypocrisies of clergy and laity alike, and the townspeople were still talking of how the Pfeiferhänschen of Niklashausen had been brought captive to the city to which he had hoped to march at the head of a peasant army, and how he had been burned outside the Deutschhauskirche as a warning to those who dared question the privileges of the established order. Yet in spite of these rumblings ecclesiastical art was in great demand, and as soon as he achieved the status of master-sculptor Riemenschneider had a full order book. City authorities, churches, monasteries, cathedral chapters and nobility were quick to recognize his genius, and his workshop flourished.

At the age of forty-five Riemenschneider was established as one of Würzburg's most influential and trusted citizens. He was elected a city councillor, and as such he was given special responsibility for the offices of the city surveyor, the municipal fisheries and several other departments, quite apart from the oversight of the Marien-

kapelle for which he had already carved his Adam and Eve and the apostles Paul and Philip in greyish green sandstone. At sixty he was a wealthy man with his own vineyards, several houses and considerable property, and in his workshops his apprentices were busily at work on the sculptures for which there was an unceasing demand. Soon he was to be elected mayor, and it was during his year of office that once again the foundations of the traditional pattern of things was shaken. Amongst the many portents was the arrival of the obstinate and energetic Luther, who spent a night in Würzburg as he made his way towards Worms in almost royal triumph.

In 1525 the peasant army foreshadowed by the rising of the Pfieherhänschen nearly fifty years earlier came swiftly into being. The land was soon in a ferment, and from up in his palace on the Marienburg the Lord Bishop of Würzburg called the citizens and council to declare their total allegiance to him and to join the gentry in smashing the revolt. The council refused, and there can be no doubt that Riemenschneider's influence had much to do with determining their attitude.

The bishop fled, and soon afterwards the forces of the farmers and peasants were furiously assaulting the Marienburg, with Götz von Berlichingen at their head. But the fortress was well placed and ringed by massive walls and deep ditches, and under the determined resistance of the guard and household of the episcopal stronghold the attackers were held off and then beaten back with heavy losses. They next tried to undermine the castle and blow it up, but this attempt was also frustrated and the peasants retreated. It was a severe defeat, and one which spelled disaster for their cause. Soon afterwards the heads were falling beneath the blows of the executioner on the Lauda bridge in the Tauber valley, and when the Lord Bishop of Würzburg returned to his city in the company of his victorious forces the burghers and the council were obliged to acknowledge his mastery. On the following day Tilman Riemenschneider and other prominent citizens were arrested. Many were beheaded, and if Riemenschneider himself was not executed — although he was regarded as the leading spirit in the matter of the disobedience of the city to its lord's demands — he

was imprisoned for eight weeks in the Randersacker Tower of the Marienburg, where he was tortured.

From that moment he was never again to produce another work of sculpture or carving. Perhaps he was disillusioned, or his clientele of wealthy patrons would no longer wish to have the work of his hands. Or it may have been, as is often said, that in revenge for Riemenschneider's championing of the cause of the common people one of the tortures to which the bishop subjected him in his damp stone prison in the Marienburg was to have all the bones of his sensitive fingers broken so that never again could those masterly hands take up the mallet and chisel.

If we glanced to the right when looking out of the *Commodore's* hatch we saw the familiar figures of Kilian, Burkhard, Totnan, Kolonat and the other patrons of Franconia facing each other across the bridge, their backs turned upon the steam-chisel and the floating cranes which panted ceaselessly in their hurry to finish their work within the appointed time. But further upstream and to the left of the Marienburg we could see the most curious of all the structures of Würzburg, the pilgrimage chapel of the Kppele, the thin tapering points of its onion-globe towers peeping above the tops of the trees of an avenue or elongated sacred grove, which extended up to it almost from the river bank. This curious chapel is a great centre of pilgrimage, for it is said that the son of a fisherman once placed in a *Bildstock* which had been desecrated by the Swedes a small wooden carving of Mary holding the body of Jesus across her kness. The shepherds and vineyard workers soon came to use it as a place of prayer, and gradually the *Bildstock* became the object of pilgrimage for people over a much wider area. It was given a roof, then a simple chapel, and as the years went by it was visited by ever increasing numbers of pilgrims, particularly at Whitsun. But the Lord Bishop of Würzburg had no wish to see a rival shrine established on the edge of the city of Kilian and Burkhard, and he was probably responsible for the fact that it was set alight. Yet the flames caused no damage to the tower and the medieval statue itself, and as a result its fame was so enormously enhanced that within a few years the bishop himself was obliged to agree to an extension of the chapel. Finally there came Balthasar



Neumann, whose riot of curling and luxuriant line of form produced in the Käppele as it exists today one of the most extraordinary rococo buildings in existence. Its popularity among Franconians is greater than ever, and scores of thousands of people come to Würzburg at Whitsun to climb the steps up the hillside, twisting and turning up the flight of stairs which lead past a series of very elaborate 'stations' which are the work of the episcopal court sculptor Peter Wagner. We climbed up there several times ourselves, passing the curious rococo groups of Roman soldiers with their fancy plumed helmets and very un-Roman sweeps of cloaks, but if in the Käppele itself the bearded monk whom we asked to tell us something about the luxuriant swirls of figures on the painted vaulting merely started and replied with a slight hiss before turning away to light the candles, we realized later that this must have been because he was under a vow of silence.

If the Schönborn line of bishops drew ecclesiastical artists of every variety to Würzburg, the successors of these master craftsmen are certainly not extinct. The *Commodore* had no sooner drawn in at the quay above the weir than she was visited as usual by the press, and the young reporter who came aboard brought with him his fiancée. In the course of conversation she astonished us by saying that she was a goldsmith, and seeing our surprise she told us that she worked as an assistant to a master goldsmith in the city, and she had no doubt at all that he would be delighted if we should care to visit his workshop. Thus it came about that on the following afternoon we presented ourselves at the courtyard in which lived Herr Joseph Amberg, ecclesiastical gold and silversmith, whose studio with its oxy-acetylene flames, electric furnaces and a wealth of modern machinery was as busy as it would have been in the days of the great lord bishops themselves.

However modern much of the equipment might be which now filled the basement of his workshop, the goldsmith himself might have stepped out of the centuries of Würzburg's past. It was not that Herr Amberg was in any way an antiquated figure, but just that he looked very much as his predecessors must have done who waited upon the chapter of the cathedral under Julius Echter or other and earlier dignitaries of the city. The dome of his bald head

was ringed with a line of curly hair which was in no way unusual and yet it reminded us at once of the head of Riemenschneider's St Philip on the Creglingen altar, except that the apostle had a further single small curl still remaining above his temples. But perhaps it was the skull cap and the white smock which gave the ageless appearance to the modern smith, for although such clothes were natural enough for a master craftsman of the twentieth century they were not very different from those of his predecessors across the centuries — except, perhaps, during the period of baroque and rococo, when the artists of Würzburg were sometimes dressed in a flamboyant style which accorded well enough with the high-flying curls and loops of their designs. And the workshop itself, for all its modernity of electric furnaces and three-phase motors, had an air of ritual and mystery about it. Row upon row of hammers of every conceivable shape and size stood in racks against the walls. Curious coloured fluids in flasks suggested that the hunt for the philosopher's stone and the *elixir vitae* was ceaselessly pursued here in the vaults, though in fact they were connected with the plating plant or recovery of traces of valuable metal. There were great safes, too, a most necessary piece of equipment in a goldsmith's workshop, and Herr Amberg himself carried a jingling ring of impressive keys like a medieval gaoler.

We were soon to discover that the beautiful objects produced in the Amberg smithy found their way into every corner of the world. Churches and cathedrals in Britain, Italy, the United States and many other lands would place an order for a modern crucifix, a chalice deftly hammered from a sheet of gold, or an altar tabernacle set with huge rubies and amethysts. And if in our non-conformist ignorance of ritual objects we could not previously have said exactly what a pyx might be, or an aumbry, or a monstrance, we were soon to learn of their purposes as Herr Amberg showed us the colour photographs of those he had made, or the detailed drawings for others on which he was at work for his customers. To ourselves these names were until then no more than those of mysterious objects over which the congregation of some parish church in England would sometimes become so rent by dissension that a consistory court — another entity which we but dimly understood

— had to adjudicate the rights and wrongs of the matter, but now that we actually saw them we were filled with admiration for the craftsmanship which went into making objects of such great intrinsic beauty, whatever their theological overtones might be. Indeed, an hour in Herr Amberg's workshop made us wonder — as the works of the Schönborn craftsmen had already done — whether our own Miltonian forefathers had not been curiously blind in trying to exclude everything of material skill and beauty from church worship and to reduce the buildings themselves to a state in which they were as sterilized and hygienic as mortuaries.

One of the most interesting processes was the inlaying to form the bright and glistening panels and medallions on the vessels and crucifixes, for although this is often termed "enamelling" it has nothing to do with enamel in the household painter's sense. The shallow cavity would be prepared in the gold or silver and somewhat undercut at the edges to key the inlay, and thin leafy partitions of the precious metal would be added to form the barriers between adjacent colours. The enamel itself was nothing more than coloured glass, finely ground to a powder in pestle and mortar and mixed with enough water to form a paste which could then be spread into position with a spatula. A touch with the corner of a piece of blotting-paper would draw out the surplus moisture, and when all the little sections of the design had been filled with their appropriate pastes the whole piece would be fired at a temperature sufficient to fuse the glass, which became opaque if it were cooled reasonably quickly. The difference in contraction coefficients between the glass and the metal would cause the inlay to curl outwards at its edges, and for this reason a nondescript enamelling would often be added on the reverse side to equalize the tension and cause the enamel to stay even. Then the fused design would be ground down and polished smooth and level with the metal which held it, to shine brilliant in its glorious colours.

On our upward journey we were fortunate enough to see another and perhaps even older craft of the Main valley, for when we were at Würzburg a pair of log-rafts passed down through the lock. We had already come by several hamlets where the tree stems from the forests were being assembled by the bank and laid out to form a

thick mat of overlapping rows of trunks in the edge of the stream, but these were the first rafts we had seen on the move. In order to give enough flexibility when negotiating the sharper bends the leading raft was attached to the one behind by only a single projecting tree stem, but otherwise the mass of wood was as solid as a battleship. Each raft was of the standard Main size — about 430 feet long and 30 feet broad — and between them they filled the lock so neatly that there was room only for the tug ahead of them and one of the Würzburg trip-boats, turned half sideways astern. On each of the rafts rough tholes were fixed for the steering sweep, which was made up simply enough of a thinner and more manageable tree stem with a rough board nailed to the end. Amidships the leading raft had a little house built of boards, with an inviting heap of hay to provide overnight accommodation. A hiker had also pitched his tent aboard one of the rafts, taking the opportunity of a most pleasant and peaceful journey down the Main.

When the gates opened, the tug steamed ahead and paid out enough cable to tow the rafts two or three hundred yards astern. But before the locks were built on the river similar rafts could often be seen sliding down the stream, making the journey all the way to Mainz with no other power but the flow of the current. Usually they would travel in convoys of eight, each float having two rafters — the steersman, and the *Nachhalter*, whose duties included cooking and tending the big wooden flagon of beer which was always carried aboard. At night the rafts would be moored up to the bank and all the men would gather for the evening meal in the wooden hut on the leading float, which was under the supervision of the *Meister*, who was in command of the whole flotilla and steered the first raft himself. In the congenial atmosphere of the log cabin there would be more beer, or perhaps a jug of *Randezackerer* or *Klingenberger*, and songs of Bavaria and the Main.

However expertly such a raft could be steered — and in the following year we were to admire for ourselves the skill of the rafters as they swept down the fast-flowing stream of the Weser, where rafting is still done without a tug — it naturally had no means of stopping, for it carried no anchor. The convoys constituted a very real hazard to upcoming craft, particularly if they happened to

meet them round a sharp corner, and for this reason a *Schelch* was always sent ahead of the convoy to carry a look-out or *Wahr-schauer* whose business it was to warn all other craft to keep out of the way. Where the channel was narrow, as at Freudenberg, there was not room for the rafts and an up-coming chain-ship convoy both to remain in the fairway, and so the lookout would run far enough ahead of the rafts to stop any approaching Main-cow, and its calves. All ships were obliged to obey the orders of the *Wahr-schauer* and to anchor until the rafts had passed if he instructed them to do so.

If the rafts are still to be found on the Main, they are no longer such an obstruction to shipping upon the much deeper and slower river with its locks and weirs, and the combined efforts of the tug and the steersmen can keep them clear of oncoming vessels. The tug-master may sometimes run out his blue flag to starboard to signal the approaching ships that they must pass him on that side, but the *Hansa 5*, the *Wilma-Maria*, the *Bavaria 29* of Bamberg, the *Dr Carlwilhelm Presser* of Frankfurt, the *Cum Deo* of Wernfeld, the *Wilhelmina* of Amsterdam, the *Karakal* from Bremen, the *Gute Fahrt* of Reistenhausen and all the other modern motor-ships which ply the Main will be able to chug busily past the vast assemblages of floating timber without fear of collision.

From ecclesiastical Würzburg our course up the river now led us in the direction of the almost equally episcopal city of Bamberg, ninety miles distant by water. By Randersacker with its famous vineyard slopes the *Commodore* led us on, past the twin hamlets of Sommerhausen and Winterhausen with their sunny south and shady north slopes facing each other across the stream, and below a ridge to port upon which stood the plain round tower of a medieval beacon, one of a chain of signal stations which could flash urgent messages swiftly across the land from Rothenburg to Würzburg. Soon the bridge of Ochsenfurt was in sight, and beside it the charming and forgotten town with its square of defensive walls, its towers and gateways and its beautiful bright pink town hall in the market place. This, the Neues Rathaus, is so-called because it is relatively new — it was completed as recently as 1496.

A clerk in the town hall led us to the top of the building to show

us the maze of wires, weights, wheels, levers, pulleys and arms which formed the mechanism of the clock, and then we descended hurriedly to the square below in order to see what it was that all these ingenious devices would achieve when the hour struck. For the Ochsenfurt clock does almost everything imaginable. First, close under the turret roof, two oxen escape from the town arms, charge and butt their heads together. The dial of the astronomical section immediately below them announces the day of the month and the state of the moon. Underneath it is the clock face, and then a skeleton which turns over an hour-glass and lowers his spear to remind the onlookers that for someone the last hour has regrettably but certainly struck. At the same moment two casement windows fly open, and out pop the elegantly bewigged heads of a pair of town councillors who listen most attentively to whatever it is that the elderly burgomaster is saying, whose lips and beard move in an hourly but inaudible address to the citizens and strangers. Finally, below the mayor, a pretty girl of Ochsenfurt nods charmingly to the people below, and holds up to them a shield bearing the Franconian coat of arms to remind them of where their temporal allegiance is due.

Ochsenfurt is within sight of one of the Franconian villages which has remained so compact within its oval walls that only in the last few years have one or two adventurous new houses summoned up the courage to stand upon the slope outside. Even then they remain cautiously close to one or other of the gateways, as though wishing to be sure that they will have time to dart back into safety if ever the terrible Swedes should again come marching up the valley with sword and fire, and with expert librarians to steal such books as might be worthy of the shelves of the Swedish royalty. And if the ring of walls is so complete that one may only see the village through one of its gateways, this is because the people had formerly to keep out the armed bands of the neighbouring nobility who were often tempted to try to raid the place and carry off its prized wines.

It was the lords of Babenberg (or Bamberg) who brought the vines from the Roman stocks in the Moselle valley as long ago as the fifth century, and planted them upon the hillside of Frickenhausen where the soil and position were almost unequalled. The wines

which came from the village were to become the delight of lords and knights and bishops, many of whom acquired domains upon the hill solely in order that they might have for themselves the rich vintages which its slopes provided, and so highly were they esteemed that Bishop John of Würzburg could find no finer present for Bishop Anselm of Paderborn than the six flagons of the vintage of 1372 which he sent to him, whilst another prelate, Bishop Otto of Würzburg, was so devoted to Frickenhäuser that in his will he instructed his executors to cut off his right arm and carry it with a cask of the wine to the monastery of Anhausen, where he wished both these objects which had served him so faithfully during his lifetime to be buried where his parents lay.

Frickenhausen is still a place of wine, and if it was to be our next port of call this was because we had been invited there by its leading vintner, Herr Meintzinger, whose family business had long been renowned among connoisseurs. If the wines of the Meintzinger cellars were not to be found in the lists of wine merchants in Britain, we soon discovered that this was merely because there was no need to export them. Wines of such quality could be sold entirely to private customers without passing through the trade at all.

To call Frickenhausen a port is somewhat misleading, for when we reached it after a voyage of only nine minutes from Ochsenfurt we found the place to be flanked by a stone dyke which was joined to the shore by a series of ribs. There were two or three narrow gaps in the outer wall, but only one of them was broad enough to admit the *Commodore's* beam, and approaching it very cautiously we could see that the water was only a foot or two deep and that the bed was strewn with boulders. In spite of the discouragement hissed to us by the scores of geese which clearly had no wish that we should invade their private waters we tried up and down the length of the dyke to find a suitable anchorage, but to their cackling delight we at length had to return to Ochsenfurt quay and make our way to the village by road.

Our host took us through the village towards the Oberes Tor, where what had once been the watchman's chamber now formed a tiny high-pitched cottage perched above the arch. Tractors, their wings laden with vineyard workers, clattered and stotted over the

cobbles, and ox-carts rumbled slowly past the low arched doorways which distinguished the houses of the vintners — for the wine-growers needed no large central courtyard with a high portal to admit the loaded hay-wains, but had instead a deep cool cellar into which a cart could in many cases run down from the street level.

Ahead of us through the archway a *Bildstock* was built into the wall of the lowest terrace, and there were many others set in the side of the sloping track which led us up to the shoulder of the hill towards the chapel of St Valentine, which stood alone in the vineyards. The sight of this beautiful little renaissance building, with the outlook over the huddled roofs of Frickenhausen and across the valley of the Main, is one which has always brought painters to the hillside, and certainly the view presents an unforgettable picture of the unchanging wineland of the Bavarian Main in all its quiet simplicity.

The chapel was built in the last year of the seventeenth century by a certain Valentin Zang who was suddenly overtaken by such complete paralysis that he could neither stand nor sit nor even hold things in his hands. Perhaps it was polio from which he suffered, but however that may be he vowed that if he recovered he would build a chapel of pilgrimage to his name-patron. And so he did, and the chapel was quickly to give its name to the Kapellenberg, which in turn has handed its title to one of the famous Meintzinger wines, the grapes of which grow along its sun-baked slopes.

At the foot of the hill stands an old stone and timber barn, the Mönchshof, all that remains of another religious foundation which was destroyed by the peasants at the height of their revolt which was to end in the ill-fated attack upon the Marienburg. Mönchshof is the finest of all the Frickenhausen wines, each of which takes its name from a hillside area which, except in the case of the Mönchshof, has its location fixed in the mind of the vineyard workers rather than by any visible features.

On the Kapellenberg we found the rows of vines being ploughed to keep down the weeds, and this was done by tractor. There was no room between the rows for the machine itself to pass, but it was parked in the lane at the top and the plough was attached to a thin steel hawser which ran over a pulley-roller clamped on the top of



the wall and thence to a winding-drum on the tractor. The ploughman would run down the hillside, dragging the plough behind him, then he would set the share into the soil and whistle a signal to the driver far up the hillside. The drum began to wind, and up came the plough with the ploughman guiding it, scattering the weeds and turning over the stony soil as it came. Then the tractor would move a yard along the lane, the roller was shifted further down the wall, and once again the ploughman would stride down the steep slope between the next two rows of vines to start all over again from the bottom.

The yield of wine from a good vineyard is astonishing. Although the ground appears so dry and stony, the vines can extract enough moisture from it to yield — as Herr Meintzinger told us — from 600 to 1500 hektolitres per *morgen*, or approximately 20 to 50 thousand gallons per acre. But this applies only to the old-style vineyards with their wasteful terracing in which so much ground is lost in walls and steps and paths. The German government offers subsidies to vinters if they recast the whole wine-land into much larger areas, and the Kapellenberg at Frickenhausen is now for the most part one single slope, which has a yield of up to 80 thousand gallons per acre. To achieve this the walls had to be grubbed out and the stone used for filling the deep vineyard lanes worn by water and the tread of feet and ox-carts across the centuries. Hundreds of acres of stepped land had to be bulldozed into a smooth continuous slope, roadways laid for the tractors, and the ground itself treated with artificials. For three years vineyards remodelled in this way will be out of commission until the new vines planted there are bearing, and it is to tide over this serious loss that the subsidy is essential if the vintner is to pay out so much when nothing is coming in. Sometimes, and particularly where the village vineyards are split into innumerable small-holdings, the moving spirit who tries to introduce such reforms has to fight against obstinacy and prejudice.

The success of the crop depends on the drainage and the sunshine of any particular area of hillside, and upon the elements in the soil. The content of potassium is particularly important, and traces of manganese and magnesium are vital, though nowadays

they can be added in the form of artificials. Then there is the suitability of the vine grown — whether it is Riesling or Sylvaner, or a cross between them, or perhaps the fruity Müller Thurgauer grape produced after long experiment by a vintner named Müller in the Swiss Thurgau area. This vine is also to be found among those which flourish on the Frickenhausen hillside, and it is a stock which is hardy, resistant to leaf disease, is fruitful, and in a good year has just the right content of sugar.

The vine has its enemies, and the starlings rank high on the list. Weather, too, can have a great effect upon quality, for the grapes need their water and sunshine at the right times. A dry August and September are the vintner's delight, and the celebrations which mark the end of the gathering will not then have been clouded in his mind by the thought that the wine is not everything it might be, and the wine queen may have the fortune to be remembered as monarch of a golden reign. Yet much depends upon what happens in the early summer. A hailstorm in June can destroy half the crop and be a serious matter financially for the grower. A late frost may wipe out a whole hillside, but the resilient Müller Thurgauer has the valuable quality of being able to start all over again to produce a fresh crop from the second lot of buds.

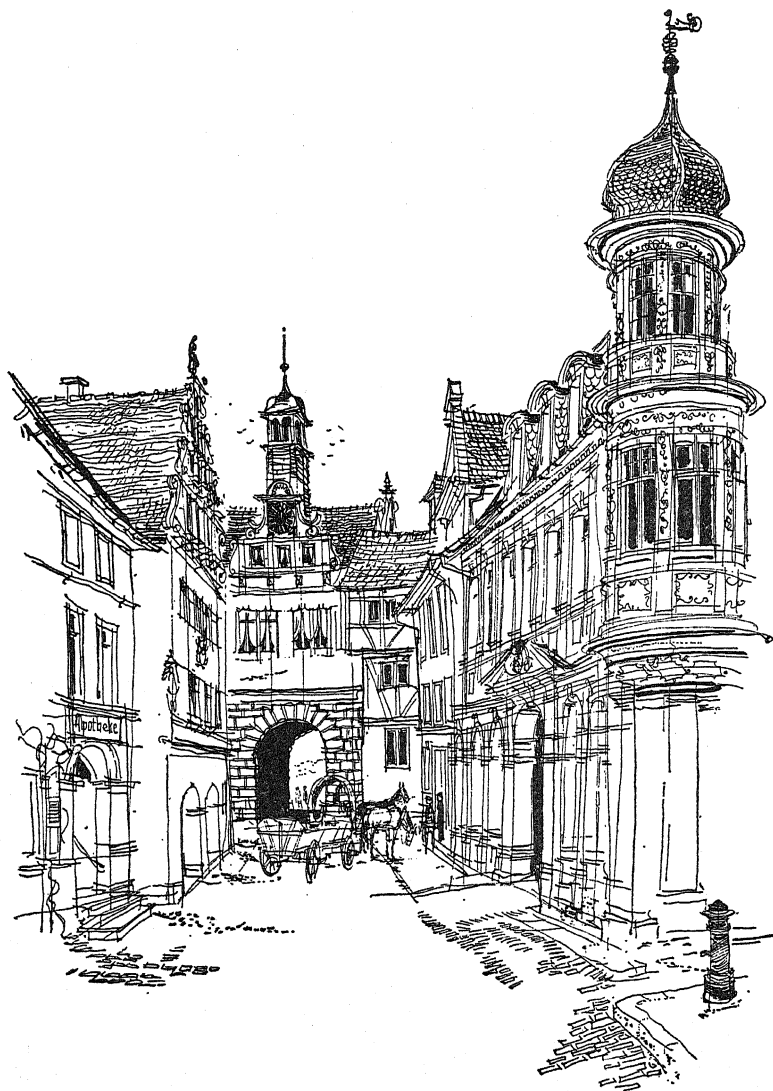
Though some of Frickenhausen's young people have been drawn to work in the sugar factory at Ochsenfurt, the village is still one of labourers sent forth into the vineyard. Its few patrician houses are those of the vintners, and the Haus Meintzinger to which we were invited to spend the evening is one which has had its cellars since the fifteenth century. On the ground floor of the older part of the building live the cows in a temperature which seemed to us to be almost blood heat, and it was only when we visited these huge creatures that we realized that we had never seen a cow in the fields of the Main valley. In fact the Franconian cattle do not go out to pasture. Like battery hens they stay indoors in their pens and wait for their food to be brought to them.

In the deep, cool cellars beneath the Haus Meintzinger we were taken to see the great wooden vats, each a beautiful piece of cooper's craftsmanship with an ornamented face and perhaps a carved inscription. Just above the tap there was a trap, clamped tightly

shut, and when the wine had been drawn this would be removed so that a suitably thin cellarman could be squeezed through the hole to clean the interior for a future filling. A modern vintner will often use steel tanks too — even plastic ones are gradually coming into use — but the wooden tun will never be entirely replaced where good wines are produced. This is because the steel and plastic are not porous, whereas the casks of wood will “breathe” — that is, the wine will seep through the wood and evaporate from the surface. The air which goes in to replace it will improve the fermentation of some types of wine, although others may be spoiled and will lose their bouquet. The modern *Kellermeister* can control these processes exactly by pumping the wines from the wooden vats to steel according to his own timetable, which may be the result of many years of experiment.

In a wooden cask, up to four per cent of the wine may be lost by “breathing”, and when we had earlier visited another vineyard in the Kaiserstuhl hills beside the Rhine we had learned that this loss was locally termed *Mäuserfrass* — or that which the mice eat. And it was to keep the loss from these imaginary mice within reasonable limits that upon the crown of one of the tuns, which held a thousand gallons of wine, there sat a lifesized cat of white porcelain watching night and day for the wicked little creatures who would steal into the cellar to eat up the rich white wine. One might think that a few gallons would not matter amid such plenty, but what the mice devour can be expensive. In the stacks of *Bocksbeutel* which lay ranged in the cellars of the Haus Meintzinger there was one which was superior to the best champagnes, and if we were given the rare privilege of drinking it at midnight in celebration of a family birthday in the vintner’s house we only discovered afterwards by looking at the list of Meintzinger wines that this particular species was priced at more than four pounds a quart.

Through vineyards, past chapels of pilgrimage, and by abbeys with their Riemenschneiders, the Main led us further into Bavaria, and each little town had some feature of its own. At Markbreit it was the stone tower of the crane, a smaller cousin of the two-headed monster of Würzburg, standing grand and heraldic on the quay where once the horses of the *Leinreiter* had reached the welcome



end of their long haul up from Mainz with cargoes bound for Munich. At Kitzingen it might be the fountain of the Irish St Kilian, or the tall round tower which wore its steeple pushed back crooked on its head as though it had drunk rather too freely of the village wines. At Volkach there was the Riemenschneider Madonna, in Sulzfeld the fine town hall erected so imposingly above the rest

of the town that the eye of the boatman is irresistibly drawn to it — as was intended, for Sulzfeld was the fortified border out-post of the Würzburg bishops in their long drawn-out struggles against the mere foreigners across the stream, the barbarians ruled over by the margraves of Ansbach. For the margraves and their men the lord bishops cared nothing, and the town hall was clearly designed to say so most distinctly by its self-consciously important appearance.

It was two days after our interview with the Würzburg newspaper that the *Commodore* arrived at the lock of Kitzingen-Hohenfeld to find a bill awaiting her. Whereas on the Neckar she had paid 45 pfennigs at each lock if she was a *Mitschleuser*, on the Main she paid nothing at all if there were other ships in the lock, but 1 mark 80 pfennigs if alone. Below Würzburg she had usually had company, but above the city there was hardly any traffic at all and she had willingly paid her proper dues. The rate was that of ships up to 30 horse-power, and in fact her motor was of that figure exactly, but the lock-keeper at Kitzingen-Hohenfeld now produced for her a ticket made out in the sum of 5 marks 40 pfennigs. The chief water-rat of the upper Main had discovered, he explained, that the *Commodore* had paid 90 pfennigs too little at each of the locks where she had paid at all, and the total out of which she had swindled the navigation authority was 5 marks 40. These arrears, together with the increased sum for his own lock, were now to be paid.

We protested that the *Commodore* had always paid the proper rate. It was beneath her to try to swindle the Rhine-Main-Danube Great Ship Waterway out of 90 pfennigs. Was she not an honest ship, a vessel of exactly 30 horses and therefore in category 1? But the keeper said no, she was not. The chief water-rat had telephoned him to levy the extra charges because she was only masquerading as a 30-horse ship. In fact, he said, she had 75 horses, as we must very well know. The chief had said so.

Surprised, we asked him how the water-rats could have any idea of the size of the motor on our ship, and he replied that everybody knew it. That very morning there had been an article about the *Commodore* in a Würzburg newspaper, and it stood there in black and white that she had the strength of 75 horses. He had seen the

report himself. '*Ausgerüstet mit einem 75-PS-Motor*,' it had said. It was useless for us to try to deny it.

He went on to tell us that the report had first been seen by the lock-keeper in Würzburg, who had at once realized that we had gone through his lock too cheaply, and he had reported the matter to the chief inspector, who in turn had telephoned all the other locks, to hear the same shocking news — except where the *Commodore* had locked through with other craft. Adding it all up he had given an order that she was to be stopped at the next lock and made to pay up.

But surely, we said, not even the chief water-rat would believe without question what he read in the paper. If the young man's imagination had led him to write in his paper that the *Commodore* had 75 horse-power, that did not mean that it was necessarily true at all.

The keeper seemed doubtful. 'It is in the paper,' he said. 'Perhaps it is the paper that tells the truth, and the ship is of Category 2. There is only your word for it that the horses are thirty.'

Yes, yes, we agreed. But would anybody who intended to lie about the size of their motor be so stupid as to allege the absolute border-line figure, when they had no knowledge that this might not be counted as 'over 30' rather than 'under 30'? Would it not have been a much more sensible and convincing lie to say that the horse-power was 29, or 28.4 rather than the exact maximum?

This, he thought, was certainly a point. Yet the chief had given his order, and that was that.

We then suggested that the lock-keeper himself should come aboard, note the number of the engine, and telephone it to the chief who could then verify the horse-power by a cable to the makers (who were in Canada, as it happened) or possibly by consulting the Ford distributors in Frankfurt, or telephoning the Dutch yard which had installed it. Our willingness to oblige, but not to pay, convinced him that we were probably being obstinate about something which was as we said it was, and he conceded that we really might know the power of the motor better than the reporter did. He allowed us to telephone to the chief inspector and repeat our explanation.

And so the matter was disposed of. There were apologies on both sides, and best wishes for a pleasant journey. The bill was cancelled, and the *Commodore* was allowed to proceed without a stain on her character, but deeply impressed by the efficiency of an administration which would go to such lengths of enquiry up and down the river to make sure that 5 marks 40 pfennigs had not somewhere slipped from its grasp.

## XI

*Golden geese — the end of navigation — Banz and  
Vierzehnheiligen — the helpers-in-need — canal song and  
canal ode — the waterway of Charlemagne — Einhard's  
failure — the Ludwig's Canal — the Commodore dreams of  
the future*

THE villages of the River Main had so many tales of farmer's wives and shepherd boys who found mysterious heaps of carrots, wheat, acorns, stones or mud which turned to gold in their hands, that we easily realized how simple it must have been for the Grimm brothers to have selected some of the ancient common stock of legend and turned it into fairy tales suitable for the nursery. And knowing them to have been such an erudite pair of professors who could never mistake truth for mere legend, we were decidedly startled when we noticed on the river bank at the hamlet of Hirschfeld, grubbing in the short grass along with the scores of commonplace white birds unselfconsciously fattening themselves for Michaelmas, a goose of canary yellow, as brilliantly gilded as any in the most uninhibited coloured children's book, in fact a genuine golden goose. We slowed, and were about to row ashore in the dinghy to examine it, when we remembered that dreadful things sometimes happened to people who touched gold that was not theirs. So we left it alone, and continued on our way, realizing that in the Main valley things might well be different from what they were elsewhere. In our own childhood we had certainly believed that the golden goose which layed its high-carat eggs was real enough, but later an increasing realism about ornithology had led us to doubt the tale and the final shreds of our belief had been annihilated by the relentless materialism of zoological taxonomy in the Natural Sciences tripos. It had taken us another quarter of a century to discover, merely by voyaging up the Bavarian Main,



that systematic zoology was nonsense and that the Grimms were right. Besides, we could see for ourselves that the creature really laid golden eggs, for a little further along the bank, opposite to where the lumbermen had assembled another raft, stood two almost fully-grown younger birds, with the last traces of juvenile grey-brown almost gone from their coats of rich metallic lustre. We drew in against the raft to step ashore for a can of milk. An old woman was hoeing a vegetable patch in an orchard, and pointing to the young geese we asked her what they were. She regarded us with a curious stare, as though we had asked her an imbecile question — as perhaps we had.

‘Golden geese,’ she said. And she returned to her hoeing.

At Hirschfeld we had come more than two hundred miles up the Main, and we were still uncertain how much further we should be able to go. On the lower reaches, below Aschaffenburg the men on the barges knew little more about the upper portion of the river navigation than they did concerning the canals on Mars. Some had thought Würzburg to be the limit for shipping, and that city now lay fifty miles astern of us. In the forest section of river we had sometimes talked to an old skipper or a retired river pilot as he sat smoking a cigar in the evening sun, and such men always told us that we must on no account fail to visit Bamberg, which even now lay another fifty miles ahead.

We had a waterways map, and if it were telling the truth we should be able to go considerably further than Bamberg, for the little blue anchor which marked the start of navigation was placed right up at Lichtenfels and from there down to Bamberg the course was clearly marked as suitable for ships of ‘less than 40 metres length and 5 metres beam’. How much less it did not say, and the fact that no locks were marked upon it made us suspicious.

To obtain a reliable map of waterways is unexpectedly difficult. A motorist can assume that if a road is marked on his map it will really be there and that it is not merely the line of a track used by prehistoric tribes or a pious hope for road improvement in the following century. But cartographers seem to be very hazy about rivers and canals, and never to take a canoe and see whether the little blue lines which they have copied from earlier maps corre-

spond to reality. At home we had a Swedish map which showed leading from the Mälär lake two canals which had never existed at all outside the imagination of the compiler, and the *Commodore* carried another modern map which marked the Thames as navigable only to Brentford but showed as major routes several waterways which had been dry since the nineteenth century. So, although our German map was one for waterways only, we were still uncertain whether or not to believe it, however clearly it might mark the locks on the river as far as Bamberg.

When we reached the lock of Garstadt, just above Hirschfeld, the keeper asked us how far we were going. His was the last lock, he added, unless we could reach the old lock at Schweinfurt, which he doubted. He called up the chief engineer of the area and let us speak to him on the telephone so that we might have up-to-date information from the one man who should certainly know. And the engineer knew exactly. The Rhine-Main-Danube Great Ship Route was complete to just beyond Bergrheinfeld, he said. We could steam up safely if we watched for the kilometre mark 336, and just above it we should see on our right a small café for campers and canoeists. As far as that point we could be sure of nine feet of water, but beyond that there would probably be very little.

When we reached the café we began to sound with our boathook, which was marked off in coloured bands of one foot each. Although there were some shoals, which conveniently marked their presence by handsome manes of trailing weed flicking in the current, the channel itself was still six feet deep, and another kilometre mark had passed before we came to a place where underwater dykes of stone were set to deflect the river into a swifter and narrow channel. At very slow speed we moved ahead, and soon the Schweinfurt railway bridge came into view. A man in overalls walking along the bank waved to us to proceed. There was no need to sound, he called. We could run up the river as fast as we liked. *Hrrusch* — just like that. The channel was dredged to nine feet right up to the lock, and beyond it there was plenty of water. *Los!* We had nothing to fear, he assured us.

We thanked him for his help but knew better than to take the

word of a landsman, if only because we could see that ahead of us the water was rippling over the shallows. With occasional groundings we crept up to the Schweinfurt railway bridge, where a mass of masonry and tangled girders was still strewn over the river bed, and although we managed to find a way through it we very soon came to a passage so shallow that there was no possibility of going any further. Every yard we touched the bottom, and ahead the stones were protruding unpleasantly from the surface. Another two feet of water would have made the difference but it had not rained for a fortnight.

We were now in one of those interesting situations — as fascinating for the typists in one of the Schweinfurt factories as it was for ourselves — of facing upstream into a reasonably swift flow when behind us the river held the major part of a dynamited railway bridge and a lot of miscellaneous rubble, but from her Swedish voyages the *Commodore* was used to awkward combinations of rocks and current and she knew how to extricate herself. She knew better than to attempt to turn until the river was deep enough over a width equal to her length, and so she allowed herself to drift down, almost stemming the current from the weir while we sounded continually behind her stern. Extremely sedately she moved back towards the bridge, and within twenty minutes she had safely covered perhaps fifty yards.

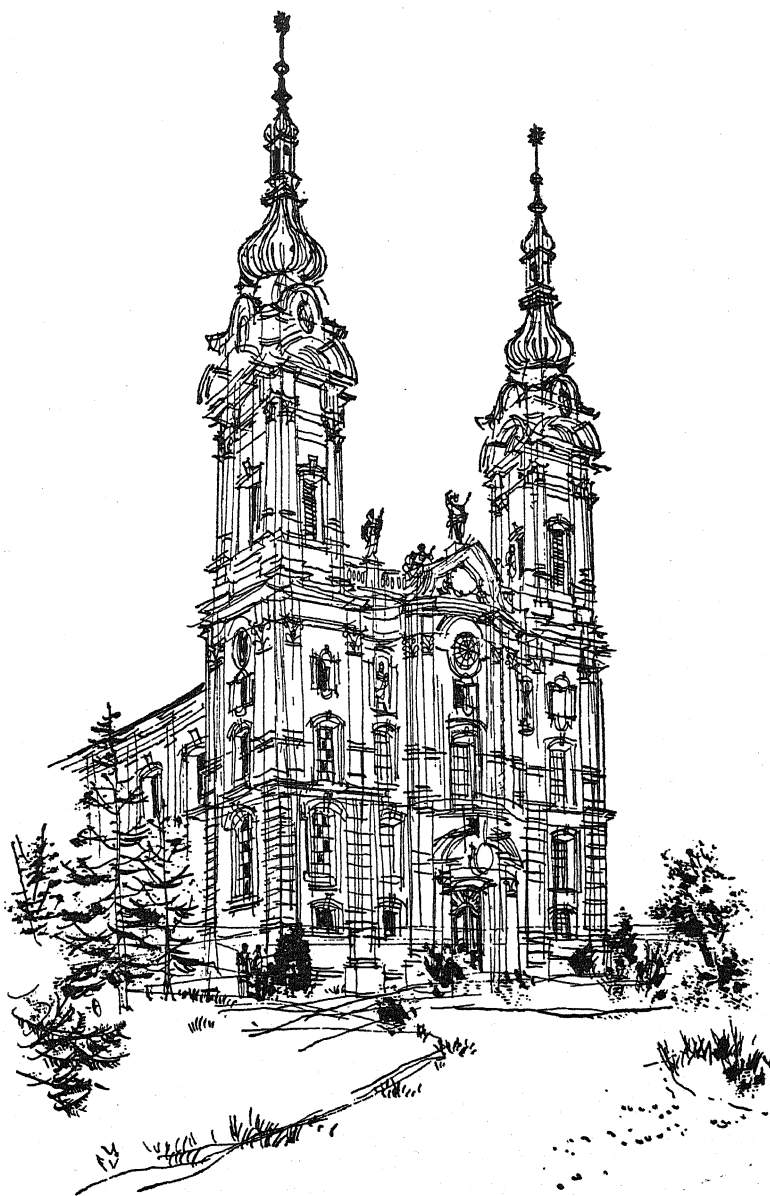
However, we had no wish to let her try the railway bridge stern foremost, because the river striking on the abutments caused a back flow across the sunken debris. So we sidled her over as far to one side as we could, and then held her stern up with our poles to let the current of the Main spin her to face the other way. When half-way round, her nose struck on a convenient shoal to halt her broadside to the current, but now we could use this useful bank of stones as a pivot for her bows and take her stern upstream under the power of the engine. When she was nearly straight we drew her quickly back from the shoal, slewed her to point for the bridge, and let her run for the arch with just enough engine power to keep her steering. She seemed to remember where all the pieces of sunken masonry and girders were which she had passed on the way up, and shooting the gaps correctly she reached the mark 336 and deeper

water without another stranding. Down at Berg Rheinfeld she drew in against a tug which had already been waiting there six weeks for the chance to pass the shallows and fetch a pair of lighters from beyond the Schweinfurt lock. Such of the upper Main as we wished now to visit would have to be reached by road.

How the blue anchor of the waterways map ever came to be sited at Lichtenfels must remain a cartographical mystery, for when we crossed the river at Staffelstein the water in the swift and pretty country stream below the bridge might have been deep enough for an eel, but even a moderately deep-bellied roach would have been in danger of running aground. Yet if the Main here is no longer a river of shipping it at least has other attractions, and from the hills which stretch back gently from either bank there stand out the two most famous of all the many architectural wonders which are sprinkled along its course from Bayreuth to Mainz. On the northern side the twin towers of Benedictine Banz look out from the edge of a cliff towards the river, and across the valley a second pair of brownish stone towers, at first sight rather similar if not identical, mark the position of Cistercian Vierzehenheiligen.

But for the peasants and the armies of the Swedes, Franconia would not have its extraordinary wealth of baroque. These expert sackers and pillagers destroyed or gutted all but the most massive and fire-resistant religious buildings, and so cleared the ground for the astonishing flowering of new art in the eighteenth century. Reflecting an upward-looking and proud theology which contrasted with the breast-beating humility of the gothic era, the palace chapels and abbey churches sprang up across the countryside, and their magnificent patrons left nothing undone which might give a sense of confident glory. The embellishments of ponds of giant carp, ornamental gardens and grottoes of classical gods which were proper adornments for the palaces of the lords temporal and ecclesiastical were paralleled in the churches by cherubs and saints and angels, swinging from the cornices and swarming up the pillars in sheer exultation. And when two monastic orders actually competed architecturally in the magnificence of buildings which were in sight of each other, no expense was spared.

Whereas Banz was a monastery church, Vierzehenheiligen was



built as a chapel of pilgrimage, and the fantastic crowning work of Colonel Balthasar Neumann was designed for that purpose alone. There are no seats, no emphasis of east and west, but merely a riot of ellipses and curves which all frame or underline the shrine which stands in the centre, and which marks the spot where a fifteenth century shepherd boy had his four successive visions, in one of which the fourteen saints asked him to build them a chapel. The monks were not inclined to take him seriously, but popular feeling supported the lad and demanded that the spot in the meadow should be marked with a wooden cross. Pilgrimages quickly grew to such an extent that before long the Benedictines were obliged to put up the first chapel (destroyed by the peasants) and then another (wrecked by the Swedes).

The fourteen saints are the *Vierzehn Nothelfer*, or fourteen helpers-in-need. Their cult became widely spread over central Germany during the time of the black death and the plague, and sometimes they are to be found as fifteen because a local favourite such as St Nicholas has been incorporated with them for good measure. We ourselves wondered who they might be, and we confidently expected to find among them St Jude, who — to judge by the frequent acknowledgments to him in the personal column of *The Times* — is not only a favourite *Nothelfer* in Britain but a saint who is actually among the Top People and reads the newspaper himself. But Jude is not one of the package deal of fourteen, and among the collection of figures perched around Kuechel's shrine, over a grating through which part of the shepherd boy's original meadow can dimly be seen, only St George, St Christopher and St Catherine are really well known. Most are more obscure saints of the middle east whose cults were brought home by the crusaders, and it is interesting to notice that their particular speciality of insurance has sometimes only a very tenuous connection with their own lives. St Vitus, the Sicilian boy who was adopted by Christian foster parents, and who is said to have cured the son of Diocletian of fits, is a very reasonable choice as specialist against rabies and palsy and dancing mania; but if the soldier Achatius, who was executed outside Constantinople, is among the group as a protector against lingering death this is merely because he was unfortunately

confused with another man of the same name who was tortured and crucified under Hadrian.

Dionysius was an early missionary to Gaul, and he is shown in his bishops robes with the broken spinal cord sticking out gruesomely from his torso, which strides out undismayed and carries its own head in its hands. Dionysius was later to be honoured in France under the name of St Denis, and because he was decapitated he was chosen as a helper against headache and migraine, which were familiar symptoms of the black death infection in its early stages. The young Barbara — possibly from Egypt — was slain by her own father in his fury when she became a Christian, and he himself was in turn said to have been killed by lightning. It must be for this reason that she is the protector against explosions and fire, and thus a favourite with bellfounders, quarry workers, artillerymen — and presumably with hydrogen bomb manufacturers.

St Margaret of Antioch was often shown, as she is at *Vierzehnheiligen*, with a dragon to symbolize evil, and thus in the popular mind she soon came to be the girl rescued by St George, the soldier who tore down Diocletian's edict of persecution and paid for the deed with his life. Perhaps it was this act which so endeared him to the crusaders that he became an English national hero, and being thought of by the knights as a perfect gentleman he would often be depicted on horseback. Thus he came to be the protector of horses of all kinds against sickness and accident. Eustachius, another soldier, withstood the loss of his wife, family and goods, and it is not unnatural that as a helper against hunger and war he should be a favourite with Catholic refugees who have known these same sufferings.

St Erasmus, Bishop of Antioch, is none other (in Italian) than St Elmo, and the sparkling static of electric storms was given his name because he was the patron of sailors. As such he was usually shown with a coil of rope, and when this was somehow mistaken for a coil of intestines his protection was transferred to abdominal diseases. Pantaleon, a doctor who was put to death by having a nail driven through his hands and into his head, is another protector against a lingering death, but the golden-tongued Catherine, who at the age of eighteen took on fifty leading philosophers in debate and

confuted them all, is patron of wagoners and millers merely because of the bladed wheel with which she was martyred. In many churches the wheel was made of wood and left loose, so that it could be quickly fetched and flung as a life-buoy to anyone who might have fallen into the miller's weir, but as helper-in-need she was to share with St Denis the warding off of the black death itself, merely because this sickness began with a discolouration of the tongue.

The genial ferryman St Christopher is well enough known, but Cyriakus is more obscure. He was a deacon of the Roman church during the persecutions of Diocletian, and was killed for the help he gave to the Christian slave labourers. His role in the fourteen is appropriate enough, for he is the helper in the hour of death. Aegidius the hermit lived upon roots and the milk of a doe, and so he came to be the helper of sick animals, whilst St Blaise of Armenia is the ear, nose, and throat specialist. Even in London he is still honoured by an annual service of 'Blessing the Throat', his claims being based on the tradition that among many who came to him for cures there was a lad who was choking with a fishbone stuck in his gullet.

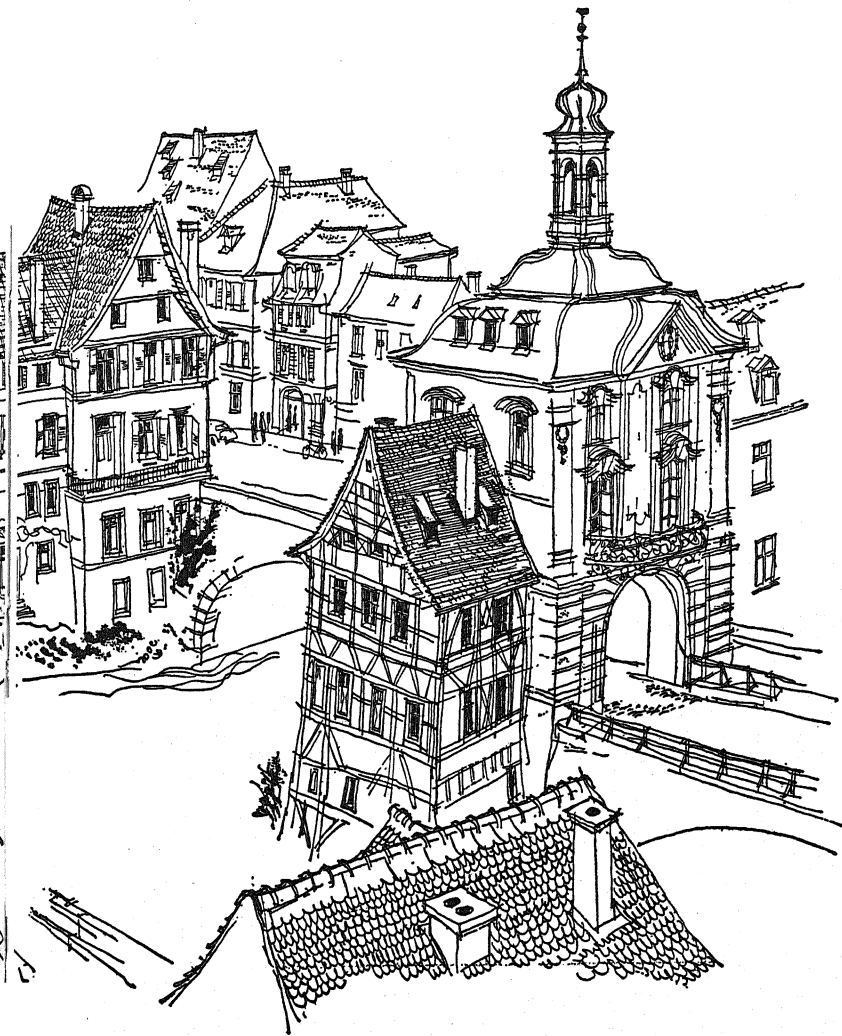
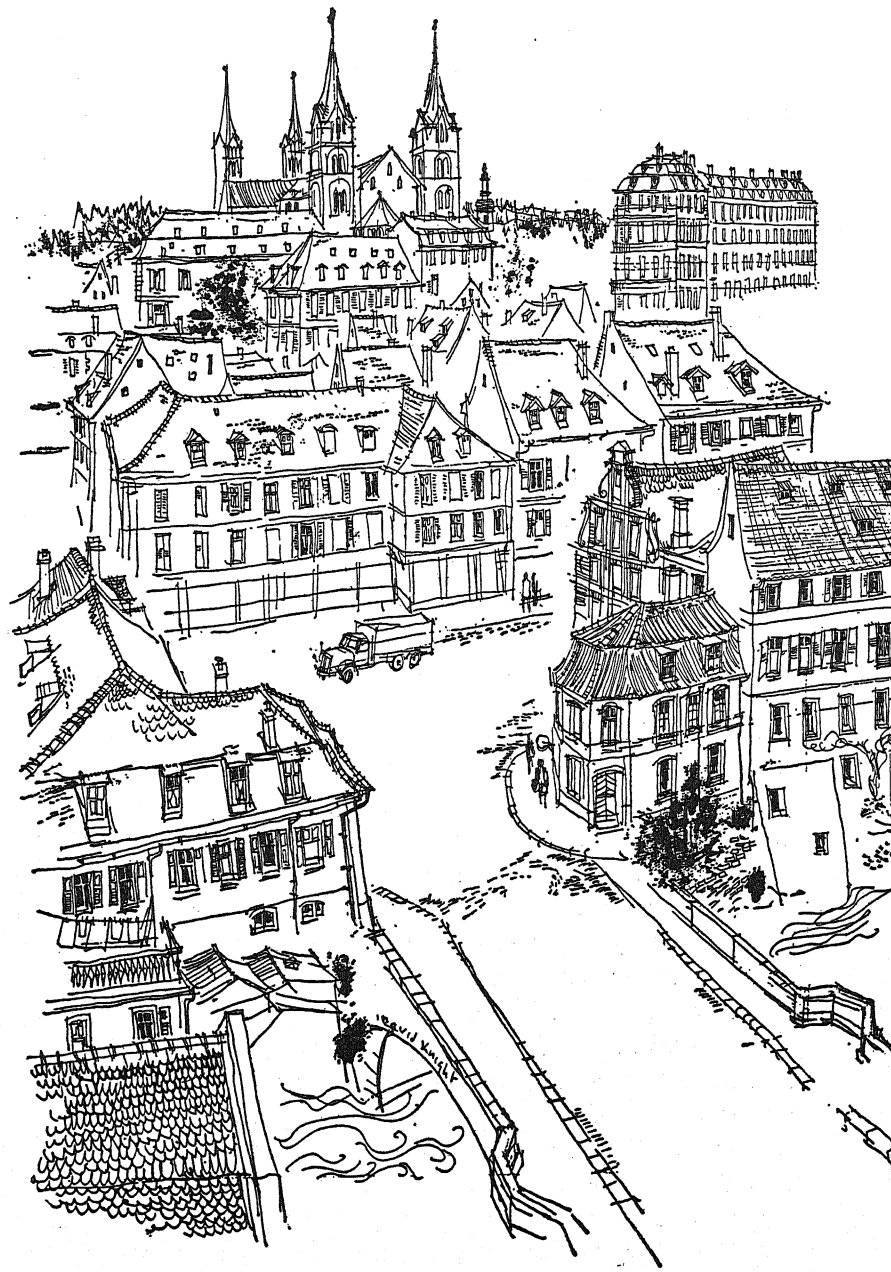
To the shrine of these fourteen saints in the glorious chapel of pink and grey and gold, scores of thousands of pilgrims flock annually — even more than come as students of art and architecture to see the heights to which baroque could be carried in the hands of such a genius as Neumann. All that the place needed, we thought, was a strong reforming character who would come with a whip and drive away the traders from their horrid shacks which sold everything from holy candles to unholy souvenirs, and which almost ringed the entire church — though at least they were outside it and not, as sometimes in France, sheltered within its walls.

Because of the low water which lay across the shoals below the Schweinfurt lock the *Commodore* was frustrated in her desire to reach Bamberg. Had she done so, she could have followed one of the branches of the Regnitz into the city, and have pulled in against the bank where the name 'Am Leinritt' still reminds one of the *Leinreiter* and their teams of horses which vanished with the coming of the chain-ships. Opposite her would have been the row of



fishermen's houses of Klein Venedig (Little Venice) which give to Bamberg what must certainly be one of the finest river frontages in the world, and just upstream of them the city hall, set in the water like some medieval merchant ship ploughing the waves. Beyond it, through the arches of the two bridges which leap across to the Rathaus like boarding planks flung aboard by pirates, she might even have glimpsed the entrance to the Nonnengraben, the first section of the Ludwig's Canal.

If I do not attempt to describe Bamberg, it is because one would need to spend a fortnight in that glorious city of central Europe in order to have even the briefest acquaintance with its palaces and churches, with the legacies of Riemenschneider and Veit Stoss, Dientzenhofer, and of others who centuries before them endowed the cathedral and the alleys and streets and hill tops with such a wealth of beautiful works. Bamberg, the city of Bishop Otto and of the Emperor Henry II and his wife Kunigunde, who withstood the ordeal by fire, is a delight, but it is also a city of the water where the wheels of the few survivors of the fifty-four mills of earlier times still turn in the waters of the Regnitz even if they are now busily engaged in turning out volts and kilowatts instead of grinding corn, sawing wood or pressing oil. It is a place which can best be experienced by boat, and even if on this occasion the *Commodore* could not reach it she was already nursing the hope that she might visit the Main again and pass right through to the Danube before she was too old to travel. Down at Bergtheimfeld where she lay alongside the equally frustrated tug, her engine had seemed to hum to us in a particular and unusual rhythm. 'Nineteen-seventy, nineteen-seventy, nineteen-seventy,' it murmured, and we realized that in that year the Oberammergau Passion would again be performed, and unless the building of the Rotterdam-Odessa waterway should have fallen behind schedule — a thing unmentionable and even unthinkable in Germany — she could take us considerably closer than she had done on this occasion. Not only would Bamberg be accessible, but Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade. She might swap yarns with barges from Rumania and Bulgaria, and perhaps follow Maxwell and Farson down through the fever swamps and the floating islands to the Black Sea. If by then the Iron



Curtain should have been folded back, she could slide swiftly through the defile of the Iron Gates and see the towpath cut in the rock by the Romans.

Budapest — yes, if she should reach Budapest she would pass under the suspension bridge for which the links were carried by boat from London, taken up the Rhine and hauled all the way to Bamberg behind the plodding horses of the *Leinreiter*, to the newly opened Ludwig's Canal and thence to the Danube. This waterway was now to be replaced by another and greater one, but even the Ludwig's Canal itself was not the first attempt to join the Main with the Danube across the watershed.

*Was Kaiser Karl erdacht,  
Hat LUDWIG kühn vollbracht,  
Zum Völkerheil.  
Rhein und Main, stammerverwandt,  
Knüpfen ein neues Band,  
Reichen die Bruderhand  
Dem Donaustrom.*

It was July 15th, 1846, and the festival song rose from the massed forces of the Erlangen glee clubs as the representative of His All Highest Majesty the King of Bavaria stood ready to pull away the veil which hid the memorial near Erlangen. To most of those who had made the journey from Nuremberg, dressed in gala uniform and transported on the flagged and decorated ships of the canal authority to the strains of national melodies played by brass bands, the tune to which the choirs raised their song was that of *Heil unserem König, Heil!* but such Britons as were present would have known it better as *God Save our Gracious Queen*. There was a festal ode, too, composed for the occasion by the poet Vies, and though few people probably heard the words it ended with suitable royal praise.

*Heil Ludwig DIR! Du Fürst so deutsch und bieder  
Du Vorbild alles Grossen, alles Schönen!  
DEIN Ohr vernehme gnädig unsre Lieder,  
Die tiefgefühlt aus treuen Herzen tönen!*

Hail to thee, Ludwig, thou lord so teutonic and sober — yes, indeed, for this was a great day for the Bavarians, and their first and only canal was open at last. But the verses went on to refer to the Emperor Charles, just as the song had done. Great Ludwig, the poet declared, had brought to magnificent conclusion that

*was der Franken grosser Karl geahnet.*

This great Emperor Charles of the Franks who conceived the idea of a canal to link the Rhine and the Danube basins was none other than Charlemagne. That he should have attempted anything of the kind may seem very improbable, and yet there is no doubt about it. Not only is the work referred to in such early records as the *Annales Einhardi* which give a year by year diary of events from 741 to 829, but the remains of the undertaking can be seen to this day and are well worth a visit by any British canal enthusiast who still believes that the world began with the Duke of Bridgwater and ended with Brindley or Telford.

Between Weissenburg and Treuchtlingen the railway running southwards from Nuremberg cuts right through the massive banks of the Fossa Carolina or 'Karlsgraben', which are the remains of Charlemagne's canal. It was dug to cross a different watershed from the Ludwig's canal, and was intended to join the upper Altmühl valley to the Rezat, which flows northward to join the Rednitz and so leads down towards the Main at Bamberg. At the point chosen, these streams are only one mile apart, and the remains of the Fossa stretch almost all the way from the one to the other. There is no doubt at all that the remains are those of the canal, for already in 867 the nearby hamlet had the name of Graben (or ditch), and excavations have revealed the boat channel, complete over nearly all its length, the actual surface level of the waterway lying in a vast trench with sloping sides which was cut down to more than thirty feet below the level of the land. This great depth of the cutting was necessary because of the difference of levels of the two streams.

It is reasonably certain that the pen-lock was unknown in the days of Charlemagne. Although it is often believed that Leonardo da Vinci was the inventor of locks he was in fact only concerned with new forms of gates, and the lock itself was in use in the

Netherlands at a much earlier date. Even so, the earliest known for certain is the lock at Spaarndam, through the modern successor of which the *Commodore* has passed on more than one occasion, and this was built in 1253. Gregory of Tours uses the word *schusa* in the sixth century, but there is no doubt that although this word is the fore-runner of *écluse* and *Schleuse* it referred at that time to fish weirs.

Without a lock, the difference in level of some thirty feet could only have been overcome by excavating the rock — unless, of course, the Altmühl valley has sunk since Carolingian times — but even that would not have solved the problem entirely. Two streams of such different heights could not have been joined by an open channel without causing a flow violent enough to demolish the entire works, and some sort of flash or sluice must have been installed at the junction with the Rezat if the canal was to have been usable at all. The necessity for this could hardly have been unknown to the engineer, the emperor's master-builder Einhard, who was not only responsible for the palace at Aachen but also achieved the remarkable feat of bridging the Rhine at Mainz.

As to why such a difficult work, which involved the transport and maintenance of thirty thousand labourers, should have been undertaken at all, it is reasonable to suspect that Charlemagne was not interested in a route from the Netherlands to Odessa, but on securing quick and efficient transport for himself between the two centres of Regensburg and Aachen, from which his campaigns were conducted against the chief enemies of the Franks to the south-east and the north of his dominions respectively. Certainly he regarded the canal as of the greatest importance, or he would hardly have built a new residence close to the scene of operations at Weissenburg and have transferred his court there so that he could supervise the works in person.

Some of the earliest medieval records state that Charlemagne eventually made the journey by water all the way from Regensburg (on the Danube) to Würzburg, and this suggests that the canal was actually completed, but it is much more probable that when Charlemagne travelled to the Christmas festival at Würzburg he had his comparatively small craft carried across to the Rezat, over

land. In fact the waterway was not finished, and continual landslides and the difficulty of keeping the cutting empty of water led to its being abandoned.

If the attempt failed, some medieval writers were to state that this was because — as the monks maintained — ‘God would not allow his own designs to be mastered,’ hinting that if the deity had wished there to be a waterway from the Danube to the Main it would have been already provided in the planning of the world’s geography. But the failure also became surrounded by rumours and legend. Cattle which ate the fodder grown on the excavated earth were said to have died, and flour milled from the corn would disappear into thin air even whilst the baker was working on it. Worse still, dreadful sounds were heard by night as the spirit hordes wandered howling and screaming through the diggings, and even by day the workmen were distracted by their attentions. Some of these spirits even conspired to pull down the banks and wreck the works.

It may well be that these supernatural causes for the failure of Charlemagne’s canal have been transferred from another and earlier one, for Dio Cassius describes the collapse of Nero’s attempt to cut a channel across the isthmus of Corinth, in the year 67, in precisely similar terms. Certainly the legends reflect the suspicion that the opposition of the Germanic tribal gods had been aroused, not only because Charlemagne had broken down their altars but also because the Altmühl was a particularly sacred stream, the banks of which were hallowed by quantities of burial sites. Altogether the Holy Emperor could hardly have selected a less propitious place at which to try his hand at the art of linking the rivers which ran through the northern and southern parts of his wide domains; and whether or not it was the fault of the spirits, more than one thousand years were to pass before a ship actually crossed the divide between the Rhine and Danube basins.

When, in 1845, Schiffer Seelig passed over the watershed of the Franconian Jura, his bank-hauled barge carried a cargo loaded on the River Main for delivery to Regensburg, and when he arrived at that city he was received with great municipal jubilations and the chamber of commerce presented him with a magnificent flag.

His voyage had other results, too, for almost immediately an association was formed for carriage of goods between Bamberg and Regensburg on the traditional *Rang* or *Beurt* system of taking turns. The next event to be celebrated in the Danube valley was the arrival at Vienna of a ship which had made the journey all the way from Amsterdam, and if the *Amsterdam en Weene* took thirty-four days for the voyage it says much for the thoroughness of the German customs that no less than seventeen of them were occupied in the frontier inspection at Emmerich on the Rhine. Even today customs officers in some places may be not much less conscientious, and when in the previous summer the *Commodore* passed the French frontier at Givet she found there barges which had already lain for three days alongside the customs quay.

From his youth King Ludwig of Bavaria had dreamed of building the canal, and it is said that the stimulus which finally prompted him to order the line to be surveyed was a gift sent to him by the State of New York, a handsomely bound presentation copy of a description of the Erie Canal. Governor De Witt Clinton's 'Big Ditch' was 364 miles long, and on its way from Albany on the Hudson to Buffalo on Lake Erie it had 83 locks. It was therefore a much longer canal than would be needed to join the Main and Danube, even if the Bavarian waterway would require rather more locks. In 1828 Ludwig was convinced that the link was possible, and he commissioned *Oberbaurat* von Pechmann to examine the possible routes and draw up a detailed scheme.

Von Pechmann wisely chose a different course from that of Charlemagne, for the Rezat route of Einhard would not have provided water enough for the larger craft of the nineteenth century. He also insisted that the canal should pass through Nürnberg and so be assured of the considerable trade of that city. The line which he finally laid out followed the river Regnitz from Bamberg to Nürnberg and crossed the Franconian Jura to the Altmühl valley at Dietfurt, from which point the Altmühl itself was to be built out as a river navigation down to its confluence with the Danube at Kehlheim. Four miles longer than Suez, the Bavarian canal would need 101 locks to climb over the Jura.

An extra push came from an unexpected quarter, for von

Pechmann had hardly begun his surveys when a rival association of German and Dutch manufacturers founded a company to survey an alternative route which would cut across the Black Forest to join the Rhine at Strasbourg with the Danube at Ulm. The company obtained concessions from the states of Württemberg, Baden and Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, and the scheme was supported by the shippers of the upper Rhine and Alsace, but the traders of Bamberg and Nürnberg naturally saw in it a serious menace to their prosperity. Clearly there could not be room for two canals, and if opinion among shippers swung away from the Black Forest route and supported von Pechmann, this was in part because they objected to one of the articles of the *Compagnie du Canal du Rhin par la Kinzing* which guaranteed to the family of its chief promoter, Baron Flèche, a hereditary title to the general directorship of the company and the personal right to nominate all the officials. But the mere existence on paper of a possible competitor drove the Bavarian monarch to press on energetically.

In 1836 the first general meeting of the company which favoured von Pechmann's Main-Danube line was held, and it passed a resolution begging His Majesty to allow the waterway to be called by his own august name. Rather more important was the fact that Baron von Rothschild was voted on to the executive, and the house of Rothschild was from then onwards to be entrusted with the whole of the financial management. 20,000 shares were issued, and a quarter of the total was taken up by the Bavarian government, but so strongly was Britain held in the grip of an almost pathological canal mania that 7,522 of the total shares were taken up by private investors in England — considerably more than were subscribed by all the German states together.

In spite of the pomp and the music of brass bands which accompanied its opening, Bavaria's only canal was never a success. Von Pechmann's technical calculations for the water supply had assumed that forty ships would pass through it in a day, but this figure was never reached. There was a small amount of local traffic, but the waterway was born in the era of railway expansion, and the inexorable principle of survival of the fittest caused it to have only a short life of moderate use. When Maxwell passed along the Ludwig's



Canal in 1905, only sixty years after Captain Seelig's great welcome at Regensburg, there was nothing left of the *Beurt* trade and the passage of a ship was so infrequent that the villagers would stream up the hillside to see him sail by. He was half way along the canal before his *Walrus* met another craft. Farson found it deserted, and he and his wife had to bank-haul for the whole 107 miles because the dense weed made it impossible to use the *Flame's* propeller. All in all, it is surprising that the canal was in a state to pass German gun-boats during the Second World War, when its condition must have resembled that of the Kennet and Avon Canal, through which an M.T.B. was dragged from the Thames to Bristol on Admiralty orders — and written off as a wreck when it reached its destination.

Yet if the railways won a victory, the time was to come when they were to prove too expensive a form of moving bulk cargoes over long distances, and Ludwig's dream — or Charlemagne's — was to be vindicated in the decision of the German government to scrap the old canal and build a new one to modern dimensions as the last link in the *Grossschiffahrtstrasse* from the North Sea to the Black. When completed, this new canal will pass much more cargo in a single lock-load of ships than von Pechmann's waterway would have carried in a day, even in its most prosperous years.

When we visited the decaying remains of the canal at Bamberg there hung over its water that strange nostalgia which a disused waterway so often exudes — even if usually accompanied by less romantic effluvia, which in this case were absent. The tow path was still there, cut close beside the tall fourteenth-century merchants' houses squeezed together on the bend of the Nonnengraben, and in the first pound there was water enough for fishermen's punts and a small trip-boat to use the lock and enter a mile or so of the clear and sparkling Regnitz river. But the quays of heavy stone blocks were deserted, and the iron hats which covered the heads of the little cranes, iron-age counterparts of the derricks of Würzburg and Marktbreit, were tattered and torn and the rain dripped red and rusty from the machinery to stain the sandstone as it trickled over the edge into the canal below.

The Ludwig's Canal must once have been as beautiful an inland route as any in Europe, and if the *Commodore* now lay separated by

twenty-five miles of shoals and shallows from even the first of its forlorn and rotting pairs of lock-gates, we could not blame her if she in her turn dreamed of the day years ahead when once again there might be rejoicings at Regensburg. Perhaps she wistfully wondered whether she might not somehow contrive to edge her way to the head of the queue at the entrance to the giant modern lock at Bamberg and so be the first to reach the Danube. Sweeping down the river where Captain Seelig had voyaged in 1845, she might swing round against the quay of Regensburg and there wait hopefully for the gentlemen of the chamber of commerce, attended by a brass band, to present her with a ceremonial flag.

## XII

*Return down the Main — two characters in search of a shipyard — Niederwalluf — the Commodore waits for the spring*

When the Würzburg lock had been dammed off, pumped out, cleared of eels, dredged free of shingle, renovated, cemented and undammed again, and filled, the *Commodore* passed by the chapel of St Burkhard and moved into the pen. Two days later one of her visitors was rowed ashore at Gemünden to catch an express towards England, and at Rothenfels lock two more walked away over the weir bridge. At Miltenberg one of her crew left to help with the production of a play at a small summer theatre on the Cornish cliffs, and shortly afterwards the steersman departed for the isles of the Aegean. With the end of the summer her human companions were quickly melting away, and when she drew alongside the *Stadt Wertheim* to take her leave of Werner Herz only my wife and I were left aboard her. Ahead of us there was a run of a mere two or three hours down to Erlenbach, where we would leave her at the shipyard until the following spring. We already had our places booked on the Ostend train for two days later, which would give us time enough to see to the laying up.

The shipyard was courteous and anxious to help us, but unfortunately there seemed to be no doubt that if the *Commodore* were left in the stream she might be crushed in the ice, and if hauled up the slip she would be in the way of new ships for which orders had been received. No, the Herr Direktor was very sorry that we had been led to believe that room could be found for her, but it was now impossible. He telephoned the water police at Frankfurt, who very much to our relief explained that there was an excellent shipyard right in the centre of that city, where we would certainly be welcome.

As Frankfurt was fifty miles and nine locks downstream, we set off at once and made Aschaffenburg just after dark, to draw in against the stout side of the K.B.K.S. and hurry ashore for a delicious dinner of Main fish steak and pike cutlets. Next morning we crept out of the harbour at first light to be sure of catching the Stockstadt lock as soon as it opened, and all the way down the river while one of us steered the other sorted out the hold, compiled the laundry list, or stacked up the mattresses in the forward cabin. By three o'clock we were down to the Eisener Steg, but as we could still see no sign of the shipyard we ran ashore to telephone the water police and ask for the exact address. Speeding off in a taxi we made a long circuit of the city's one-way streets only to arrive back at the far side of the footbridge, immediately opposite the *Commodore's* berth. And there was the shipyard, a mere floating shack which hired pedalos. We could see at a glance that there was no space to moor a rowboat, let alone the *Commodore*, but the proprietor was most anxious to help, and he told us of an excellent yard a mile or two further down. On our arrival it proved to be no more than a club shed with a slipway which could hardly have hauled out our dinghy, so without even slowing we sped on towards Höchst and the night.

We were fortunate enough to find a bunker-ship which was still manned, and as he filled our cans the bunkerman told us that our only chance of a berth would be at Kostheim, half a mile short of the confluence with the Rhine. There was no hope of reaching there before the locks shut, but we managed to squeeze in with the last lock-full at Griesheim, and hurrying on in the dark we came down at last to Eddersheim lock, where nearly twenty ships were lying massed above the closed gates. Cutting over to the top of the weir we made fast to the bank, crawled under the fence, and found some sausage and wine in a village inn.

Time was now running very short, so at half past four in the morning we took the boat-hook and carefully measured the breadth of the row-boat lock at the side of the weir. We found it broader than the *Commodore* by nearly two inches, and we knew that if we could squeeze through it we could pass the entire concourse of waiting ships. We wound vigorously at the gates and paddles, filled

the lock, eased the *Commodore* into it, and then let out the water. With her fenders up she slid down neatly on the falling level and reached the bottom safely.

But when we came to open the gates, we found that one of them would not fold right back, probably because it had gravel in the hinge. No amount of wrestling with the windlass would open it any further, so we climbed down the ladder from the lockside and nosed the *Commodore* into the gap. When she had filled the whole aperture we pulled back the accelerator and let her push with all her might; but she could not quite force her way through.

It was then that we remembered how the captain of the legendary ship *Mannigfual* had dealt with a similar situation when jammed between the Dover cliffs and Cap Gris Nez. Following his example we backed the *Commodore* out of the gap, smeared soap along her rubbing-strips amidships, and returned to attack the gate again. Twisting her wheel backwards and forwards we made up an inch on one side, then on the other, and as the gate creaked and groaned at her rude insistence she brought her broadest beam little by little up to the entrance, trembled for a moment, and then slid through into the open water beyond. She was still almost an hour ahead of the first ships which would be leaving Eddersheim that morning by more conventional means.

The next lock at Kostheim was the last, and beyond it we found our fourth shipyard, a bustling place with gantries and welding sheds and piles of heavy steel plates. Once again the manager was sympathetic, and he would probably have found a place for the *Commodore* had he not had a mistrust of wooden ships. It so happened that as a special concession the yard had just slipped one for some important local dignitary, and the bottom had fallen out of it. There it lay, obstructing the slipway, and a Dutch tug which was to be hauled out for urgent repair had been obliged already to wait for three days. However, the office telephoned to three other yards on the Rhine, only to find that none of them could help us.

We now thought of our former friends, the *Wasserschutzpolizei* of Mainz, and returning aboard we raced out into the cold grey water of the Rhine and swept down towards their watchtower by the Flosshafen. We now had only three hours until our train would

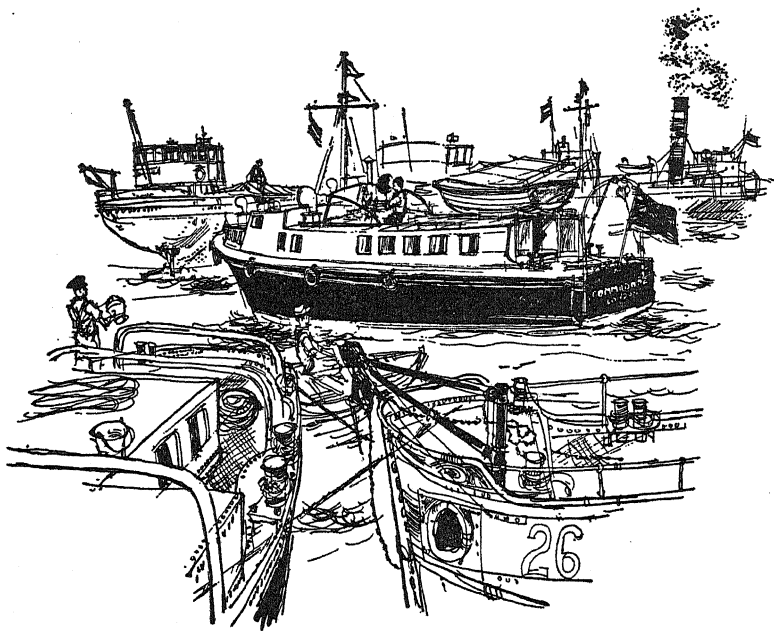
be leaving Wiesbaden, and although we had brought no coffee to offer as a non-bribe we begged the officers to help us. We could of course have returned to the Schmidts' yard, but we explained that during the previous winter the chimneys of the nearby Biebrich cement works had filled the *Commodore* with a quarter of an inch of dust, and we would prefer to leave her in a place where she would not be cemented up both inside and out. The officers consulted together and telephoned one or two barge-building yards without success. They then declared that there was only one possibility between there and Koblenz — this city being more than sixty miles ahead down the Rhine, and the further side of the great defile of the Bingen rapids and the Lorelei. This one chance was at Niederwalluf, seven miles down the river, but unfortunately there was no answer from the yard when they tried to enquire for us by telephone.

Rather than wait we ran back aboard, slid out into the tossing turbulence of the Rhine and forged down the river. Just below the kilometre mark 508 was a large open backwater protected by a low dyke, and a number of sailing yachts were riding at anchor. We sounded our way in, dropped the hook in five feet of water, and rowed swiftly ashore.

Herr Heim, we were told by a painter, was not there. It was possible he would be back within an hour. Our only hope was to take a chance on his willingness, so we drained down the water pipes, emptied the boiler, took off the cooling system of the motor, bedded it down under a cover, and disconnected the batteries. We washed, changed, packed the last of the bags, and started ferrying the luggage ashore.

Eventually we saw a short red-faced man labouring out toward us in an awkward kind of punt. His face seemed to be one permanent sailorly smile, and looking the *Commodore* over with an appreciative eye he declared that she was very welcome to spend the winter months in his care. She could remain at anchor in the Rhine, and before the floods came he would probably find another anchor with which to hold her back from being swept down the gorge and onwards to the sea.

We pulled the hatches shut and jumped into his punt. Ashore



Herr Heim piled the baggage into his car and we raced off with him towards Wiesbaden, to find our express steaming slowly into the platform.

'So, so,' he said as he reached up to the compartment window to hand in our bags. '*Und in April, wo geht die Reise hin?*'

To the Lahn, we said. And in the summer to the Weser.

'*Die Lahn, und die Weser. Ja, die zwei sind wunderschöne Flüsse.*'

Wonderful rivers they were indeed to prove, but as yet we knew nothing of them. And if, during the damp English winter, we often wondered how the *Commodore* was faring — for Herr Heim, like all the best boatmen we had met in our travels, never wrote to tell us — we pictured her not on the Lahn or the Weser, not even at Niederwalluf, but on those sister streams of southern Germany. Or, more correctly, on those brother streams, for they happen to be *der Neckar* and *der Main*, a pair of masculine rivers.

Brothers, but by no means twins, for the Neckar is a knightly stream, bordered by the castles of a dozen barons and robber ruffians, the Main a river ecclesiastical, its soft reaches resounding to the tolling of the bells within the walled villages of the vintners.

Both are among the most beautiful rivers of Europe, and if others may equal them, none can surpass them. None, particularly when they are seen as we ourselves saw them at a gentle six knots, a speed which gave us time enough to come to know them with affection whilst the *Commodore* herself could develop a more casual acquaintance with the ships which met her as she carried us up towards Swabia and deep into Bavaria.

The *Mathilde Louise Presser* of Frankfurt, the *Saphir* of Neckarsteinach, the *Lindthal* of Freudenberg, they and the others would see her several times during the winter when they swept past Niederwalluf on their busy errands, whilst she hung there waiting. Waiting for the spring, for the blossom on the hillsides, and for the cool water to slide under her keel once more and eddy away in her wake as she set out on another voyage.





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Formerly a research scientist at Cambridge, Roger Pilkington has written a number of books on scientific and religious subjects, but he also enjoys a widely-growing reputation as a writer of travel and children's books. For many years he and his wife, and their two children, have spent their holidays exploring the waterways of several European countries in his boat, the *Commodore*. Families who have followed Dr. Pilkington's fascinating stories of these journeys in his earlier 'Small Boat' books (BELGIUM, HOLLAND, to the SKAGERRAK, SWEDEN, and ALSACE) will also find much to enjoy in his books written for young people about the adventures of Peter, Jill and Michael Bransome exploring the same rivers and canals in their boat, the *Dabchick* (JAN'S TREASURE, THE CHESTERFIELD GOLD, THE MISSING PANEL, THE DAHLIA'S CARGO, DON JOHN'S DUCATS, and NEPOMUK OF THE RIVER.

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